

Earth Manifesto



Salvation and the Threats Posed by MAGA Trumpmania

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Extreme weather events are causing "global weirding" in summer 2023 in the Northern Hemisphere. The deadliest wildfire in more than 100 years in the United States occurred on the Hawaiian island of Maui in early August -- of all places! -- and the first tropical storm to hit California in 84 years blew ashore on August 20. More acreage has burned than ever before in Canada this year, and ocean waters off south Florida incomprehensibly exceeded 100 degrees (as hot as a hot tub!), while severe heat waves have caused places like Phoenix to suffer record numbers of days at or above 110 degrees, etc., etc.

Bizarre weirding of American politics is also taking place in recent years, and it is, in ways, even more ominous, because the need to adequately address big challenges like the ramping up of insidiously worsening climate catastrophes is of the utmost urgency, yet MAGA politicians and the Republican Party are dead set against cooperative problem-solving as the years stagger into a dystopian future.

Humanity's best hope for responsibly coping with this enormous tragic existential problem is to find common cause and responsibly work together to prevent worst case scenarios.

Unfortunately, our political system is under concerted siege by those who aim to create chaos and take advantage of the ensuing instability for their own power and profit. They want total political control, but democracy stands in the way, with its respect for majority rule, democratic fairness, rules of law, social and environmental justice, and a strong Constitution that stipulates a well-balanced separation of powers between executive, legislative and judicial branches of the federal government, and between it and the States.

The purpose of this essay is to put these issues into proper big picture context, and to expose the nature of this danger-engorged political weirding, along with its causes and some good ways to mitigate these problems.

The Big Story

Look what's happening here. An odd coalition undergirds MAGA Republicanism. Small government conservatives join anti-government reactionaries, despotic Big Brother control freaks and right-wing populists who are deluded fawning followers under the insidious influence of the Trump personality cult demagogue, and they are all in league with treacherous bedfellows wedded to religion-on-the-march Christian nationalists and misogynistic anti-choice activists in our male-dominated patriarchal society. And these people are in a power-abusing coalition with authoritarians, racists and neo-fascists -- and Big Oil front groups, profiteering Big Businesses and crony capitalists.

This coalition exists within a "conservative media complex" echo chamber of slanted news and opinion that agitates the electorate with emotion-manipulating "angertainment", and deviously divisive "news" that hypes up culture war conflicts to distract people from the skullduggery going on beneath the sound and fury of hot button social issues.

Let's follow the "conservative" Big Money. Look closely and honestly at the puppeteers behind this movement of exploited populists and the shred manipulators who animate them. Look at their master plan, in order to properly understand the driving forces behind all the emotion-hijacking propaganda and culture war distractions.

A Sweeping Expansion of Presidential Power -- Proposed by Scheming Republicans!

Our Founders were strongly opposed to imperious rule, and declared independence from the British Empire version of it in 1776, and later created a brilliant Enlightenment Era-guided Constitution to prevent future individuals or factions from usurping and abusing power and imposing oppressive minority rule. Their ideals favored majority rule of the people, by the people and for the people.

So it is highly ironic that Trump Republicans are now planning on making a major power grab, as reported by *The New York Times* on July 17, 2023 in the long article *Trump and His Allies Forge Plans to Increase Presidential Power in 2025 — representing an extraordinarily grave threat to our democracy.*

"Donald J. Trump and his allies are planning a sweeping expansion of presidential power over the machinery of government if voters return him to the White House in 2025, reshaping the structure of the executive branch to concentrate far greater authority directly in his hands."

"The former president and his backers aim to strengthen the power of the White House and limit the independence of federal agencies." These plans sound like a vengeful catastrophic calamity for our democratic republic, and for peoples around the world. "Neutralizing the media's power to expose his well-documented corruption would be one of his top priorities."

If Trump somehow manages to win another term in the White House, he plans to eliminate constraints on his power, installing loyalists to him, crushing opposition, evading accountability, and ruling like a despotic king and ruthless authoritarian. This is not merely rash conjecture of uninformed opinion, it is a matter of a master plan set forth in Project 2025, as analyzed below.

The price of "owning the libs" is exorbitant, and the costs are borne by the MAGA faithful possibly even more heavily than by the disappointed, frustrated and harmed liberals, progressives and centrists.

Historian Ruth Ben-Ghiat, a scholar on fascism and authoritarian leaders, wrote soon after this New York Times report that "Trump's plans to reshape the federal government to give himself vast personal powers if he returns to the White House in 2025 would make the United States similar to authoritarian systems in which the executive branch wields outsized power with respect to the judiciary and legislature."

Those plans "are consistent with a 21st century playbook for authoritarians: Tell the public how you will set up an authoritarian state well before you get into office. Frame your intended expansion of executive powers as a mere streamlining of government. Don't forget to repeatedly praise dictators as 'brilliant' and 'top of the line' people so there'll be no surprises when you act in a similar manner. And whet your followers' appetites for destruction of existing norms by advertising how you will purge 'the sick political class that hates our country' from government."

"Many Americans have become habituated to Republicans normalizing exceptional events -- the violent Jan. 6, 2021 coup attempt being a glaring example. Even so, as a scholar of authoritarianism," wrote Ben-Ghiat, "I was chilled by Trump associates' casual descriptions in the Times' report of how he and they intend to destroy the independence of democratic institutions and make them serve Republican, and more specifically Trumpian, ends. The destruction of democracy is being marketed to Americans as a kind of equalizer, a 'correction' of a system currently skewed to liberal priorities."

"The plan is for Trump to finish the devastating work he started during his first term of rooting out any civil servant attached to professional ethics. To take the State Department as an example, retired Ambassador Nancy McEldowney likened what already happened there under Trump's tenure to a 'hostile takeover and occupation,' with nearly half of career ministers retiring or pushed out in just the first two years of his presidency."

"Remember the executive order that implemented a travel ban from Muslim-majority countries? It was part of a planned blitzkrieg on our democratic system. 'Get used to it. @POTUS is a man of action and impact ... Shock to the system,' Trump advisor Kellyanne Conway tweeted a week after his inauguration in January 2017. 'And he's just getting started.'"

"As for how they might accomplish this takeover, given that Trump has talked about terminating the Constitution -- and incited an insurrection to stay in power illegally -- nothing is off the table. There's a reason that

the Protecting Our Democracy Act, passed by the House in 2021, would have limited 'abuses of presidential power,' including misuse of states of emergency. At the very least, stripping employment protections for potentially tens of thousands of civil servants, who could be replaced with Trump loyalists and ideologues, offers a quick way to remake the profile of the federal bureaucracy."

New York Times reporters provided these startling insights about the Trumpian intention:

"Their plans to centralize more power in the Oval Office stretch far beyond the former president's recent remarks that he would order a criminal investigation into his political rival, President Biden, signaling his intent to end the post-Watergate norm of Justice Department independence from White House political control."

"Mr. Trump and his associates have a broader goal: to alter the balance of power by increasing the president's authority over every part of the federal government that now operates, by either law or tradition, with any measure of independence from political interference by the White House, according to a review of his campaign policy proposals and interviews with people close to him."

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"Trump intends to strip employment protections from career civil servants, making it easier to replace them with loyalists if they are deemed obstacles to his agenda. These government employees should properly be nonpartisan professionals and experts who are protected against being fired for political reasons."

"Trump views the civil service as a den of 'deep staters' who tried to thwart him at every turn when he was in office, including by raising legal or pragmatic objections to his immigration policies, among many other examples."

And the Trump cabal "plans to scour the intelligence agencies, the State Department and the defense bureaucracies to remove officials he absurdly vilifies as 'the sick political class that hates our country.'"

My Fellow Americans, Unite!

Republicans want dictatorial control over the people, and are pursuing that goal with maniacal MAGA fervor by usurping power and abusing it, passing restrictive voting laws, creating extremely unfair gerrymanders of congressional districts, and using highly manipulative spin and big lies to get support. They are also banning abortions, criminalizing the procedure. This reveals that pregnant women have become disrespected pawns in a debate that happens to have numerous tragic impacts -- and literally "a body count."

And Republicans are banning books, scapegoating LGBTQ people as well as immigrants, and demonizing anyone who criticizes them or dares to try to hold them accountable for abuses of authority or engaging in conflicts of interest or other misdeeds. And many Republicans engage in demonizing and scapegoating Jews, which is a notoriously nefarious age-old religious fundamentalist hate-group scheme to persecute Jewish people and marginalize them.

Republicans are using Viktor Orbán in Hungary as a model for the U.S. "He is not a heavy-handed tyrant; he has not led a military coup or appointed himself maximum leader," explains Jonathan Rauch in his intriguing article *Trump's Second Term Would Look Like This*. "Instead, he follows the path of what he has called 'illiberal democracy.' Combining populist rhetoric with machine politics, he and his party, Fidesz, have rotted Hungarian democracy from within by politicizing media regulation, buying or bankrupting independent media outlets, appointing judges who toe the party line, creating obstacles for opposition parties, and more. Hungary has not gone from democracy to dictatorship, but it has gone from democracy to democracy-ish. Freedom House rates it only partly free. The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance's ratings show declines in every democratic indicator since Fidesz took power."

"The U.S. is an older and better-established democracy than Hungary. How, then, could MAGA acolytes emulate Orbán in the American context? To simplify matters, set aside the possibility of a stolen or contested 2024 election and suppose that Trump wins a fair Electoral College victory. In this scenario, beginning on January 20,

2025, he and his supporters would set about bringing Budapest to the Potomac by increments."

Their playbook, summarized from Jonathan Rauch's more extensive and ominous description, goes like this:

- First, install toadies in key positions.
- Second, intimidate the career bureaucracy.
- Third, co-opt the armed forces.
- Fourth, bring law enforcement to heel.
- Fifth, weaponize the pardon.
- Sixth, the final blow: Defy court orders.

Matters would likely come to a head very soon after Trump grabbed power, if the majority of voters are too bamboozled to prevent him from doing so. He would lose court cases against him, and lose on appeal, and face court orders to stop what he is doing. At that point, he would simply ignore the judgments.

A famous precedent suggests that Trump would get away with defying court orders. Jonathan Rauch: "In 1832, the Supreme Court ruled that states were illegally seizing Indian lands. President Andrew Jackson, a racist proponent of forced assimilation, declined to enforce the verdict. The states continued stealing Indian lands, and the federal government joined in. Trump, who hung a portrait of Jackson near his desk in the Oval Office, no doubt knows this bit of history. He probably also knows the consequences Jackson faced for openly defying the Court: none."

"With reelection in the balance, defying the courts was a bridge the president did not cross in his first term. From the beginning of that term, when the Supreme Court scrutinized his Muslim travel ban, to the very end, when the Court swatted away his blitz of spurious election lawsuits, the judiciary was the strongest bastion of the rule of law. Its prestige and authority were such that not even a belligerent sociopath dared defy it."

But if Trump manages to seize power in the 2024 elections, he would never again face voters, so would have no compunctions. Already he claims that courts' orders are politically motivated and are illegitimate machinations by Democrats and the "deep state." He would again politicize the Justice Department in his defense, and to hound those opposed to his abuses of power. He would fire inspector generals to avoid unfriendly scrutiny. He would adopt wrong-headed regulations (again). He would refuse to provide documents to Congress to avoid prosecution (again).

In another go at the presidency, Trump's lawlessness might seem shocking at first. Yet soon, as Republicans defend it using a barrage of emotion-manipulating propaganda, the public might grow used to it. To salvage what it can of its authority, the Supreme Court would likely accommodate Trump more than the other way around, and it would become gun-shy about crossing him.

With the courts relegated to advisory status, the rule of law would no longer hold sway. In other words, America would no longer be a liberal democracy, and by then, there would not be much anyone can do about it.

Republicans in Congress probably would not responsibly turn against the dictator wannabe. "We should rationally assume that if Republicans protected him after he and his supporters attempted a coup, they will protect him no matter what else he does. Republicans are now so thoroughly complicit in his misdeeds that anything that jeopardizes him politically or legally also jeopardizes them. He already showed in his first term that he can and will stonewall congressional investigations," adds Jonathan Rauch.

In Trump's first term, resignation threats acted as a brake on his actions. They thwarted the Jeffrey Clark election subversion scheme, for instance. A resignation threat by the CIA director deterred Trump from installing a hack as her deputy. A resignation threat by the White House counsel deterred him from firing Special Counsel Robert Mueller."

"In another Trump reign, however, he would have little to fear politically, because he will never again appear on a ballot. If officials threaten to resign, he can replace or circumvent them. Their departures may slow him down but cannot stop him. Besides, he finds ways to remind his subordinates that angering him is a risky business. Noisy resignations will result in harassment by his supporters (the sorts of torments that hundreds of honest election

officials have endured) and -- you never know! -- maybe by federal prosecutors and the IRS, too."

"Unless Democrats drive Republicans into the political wilderness, overriding his veto (which requires a two-thirds vote of both chambers) is nigh-on impossible. Impeachment would no longer frighten or even concern him, because he has weathered two attempts and come back triumphantly."

"Of course, there would be congressional hearings, contempt-of-court orders, outraged *New York Times* editorials. Trump needn't care. The MAGA base, conservative media, and plenty of Republicans in Congress defend their leader with whatever untruths, conspiracy theories, and what-abouts are needed. Fox News and other pro-Trump outlets play the role of state media, even if out of fear more than enthusiasm."

"Meanwhile, MAGA forces would be busy installing loyalists as governors, election officials, district attorneys, and other crucial state and local positions. They would not succeed in every attempt, but over the course of four years, they would gather enough corrupt officials to cast doubt on the legitimacy of any election they lose. They invent creative ways to obstruct anyone who challenges them politically. And they are not shy about encouraging thuggish supporters to harass and menace 'traitors'."

And so, after four years, America would cross Freedom House's line from "Free" to "Partly Free" -- and possibly to "Not Free". "The president's powers are determined by what he can get away with. His opponents are harried, chilled, demoralized. He is term-limited, but the MAGA movement has entrenched itself," and would no doubt set about allowing him to rule for life.

Trump is basically demonstrating in the U.S. what Orbán proved in Hungary: "The public will accept authoritarianism, provided it is of the creeping variety."

Orbán declared in 2014, "We should not be afraid to go against the spirit of the age and build an illiberal political and state system." Trump and his followers openly plan to emulate Orbán. "We can't say we weren't warned," concludes Jonathan Rauch.

(Jonathan Rauch is a contributing writer at *The Atlantic* and a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, who has authored the book *The Constitution of Knowledge: A Defense of Truth*.)

Balanced Power

Peter L. Strauss, professor emeritus of law at Columbia University and a critic of the strong version of the unitary executive theory, argued that it is constitutional and desirable for Congress, in creating and empowering federal agencies to perform important tasks, to also include some checks on the president's control over officials "because we don't want autocracy". Such constraints are necessary to prevent objectionable and repressive abuses of power.

"The regrettable fact is that the judiciary at the moment seems inclined to recognize that the president does have this kind of authority," Strauss said. "They are clawing away agency independence in ways that I find quite unfortunate and disrespectful of congressional choice."

Mr. Trump has also vowed to revive the practice of "impounding" funds, or refusing to spend money appropriated by Congress for programs he doesn't like. After Nixon used the practice to aggressively block agency spending he was opposed to, on water pollution control, housing construction and other issues, Congress banned the tactic.

"Mr. Trump intends to bring independent agencies -- like the Federal Communications Commission, which makes and enforces rules for television and internet companies, and the Federal Trade Commission, which enforces various antitrust and other consumer protection rules against businesses -- under direct presidential control."

"Mr. Trump and his advisers are making no secret of their intentions -- proclaiming them in rallies and on his campaign website, describing them in white papers and openly discussing them."

"Some elements of the plans had been floated when Mr. Trump was in office but were impeded by internal concerns that they would be unworkable and could lead to setbacks. And for some veterans of Mr. Trump's turbulent White House who came to question his fitness for leadership, the prospect of removing guardrails and centralizing even greater power over government directly in his hands sounded like a recipe for mayhem."

A recipe for mayhem is not good. "It would be chaotic," said John F. Kelly, Trump's second White House chief of staff. "It just simply would be chaotic, because he'd continually be trying to exceed his authority but the sycophants would go along with it. It would be a nonstop gunfight with the Congress and the courts."

"The agenda being pursued has deep roots in the decades-long effort by conservative legal thinkers to undercut what has become known as the administrative state -- agencies that enact regulations aimed at keeping the air and water clean and food, drugs and consumer products safe, but that cut into business profits."

At a recent rally in Michigan, Trump declared, "We will demolish the deep state. We will expel the warmongers from our government. We will drive out the globalists. We will cast out the communists, Marxists and fascists. And we will throw off the sick political class that hates our country." This is maniacal spin, for there are almost no communists and Marxists in positions of authority in the U.S., and as for fascists, they actually support Trump and his plans to abuse authority, rather than being proponents of more sensible liberal policies.

Electing Trump again would not only promote chaos, but also likely hand the untrustworthy narcissist a stinging whip to wield despotic tyranny over the people.

Devious Republican Spin, and Dangerous Intentions

"What we're trying to do is identify the pockets of independence and seize them," said Russell T. Vought, who ran the Office of Management and Budget in the Trump White House and now runs a policy organization, the Center for Renewing America.

The strategy in talking openly about such "paradigm-shifting ideas" before the election, Mr. Vought said, is to "plant a flag" -- both to shift the debate and to later be able to claim a mandate. He said he was delighted to see few of Mr. Trump's Republican primary rivals defend the norm of Justice Department independence after the former president openly attacked it.

"The president's plan should be to fundamentally reorient the federal government in a way that hasn't been done since F.D.R.'s New Deal," said John McEntee, a former White House personnel chief who began Trump's systematic attempt to sweep out officials deemed to be disloyal in 2020, and who is now involved in mapping out the new approach. "Our current executive branch," he added, "was conceived of by liberals for the purpose of promulgating liberal policies. There is no way to make the existing structure function in a conservative manner. It's not enough to get the personnel right. What's necessary is a complete system overhaul."

Two of the driving forces of this effort to reshape the executive branch are Mr. Trump's own campaign policy shop and a well-funded network of conservative groups, many of which are populated by former senior Trump administration officials who would most likely play key roles in any second term.

Mr. Vought and Mr. McEntee are both involved in Project 2025, a \$22 million presidential transition operation that is preparing policies, personnel lists and transition plans to recommend to any Republican who may win the 2024 election. The transition project, the scale of which is unprecedented in conservative politics, is led by the Heritage Foundation, a think tank that has shaped the personnel and policies of Republican administrations since the Reagan presidency. Its legal underpinning is a maximalist version of the so-called unitary executive theory.

This legal argument rejects the idea that the government is composed of three separate branches with overlapping powers to check and balance each other. Instead, the theory's adherents self-interestedly argue that Article 2 of the Constitution gives the president complete control of the executive branch, so Congress cannot empower agency heads to make decisions or restrict the president's ability to fire them. Reagan administration lawyers developed the theory as they sought to advance a deregulatory agenda.

Power has always been a driving force for Trump. He often treats it in a simplistic manner, as he did in 2019 when he declared to a cheering crowd, "I have an Article 2, where I have the right to do whatever I want as president." Trump made the remark in reference to his claimed ability to fire Robert Mueller III, the special counsel in the Russian election interference investigation. That investigation "primed his hostility toward law enforcement and intelligence agencies." Trump also tried to get a subordinate to have Mueller ousted, but was defied.

Early in Trump's presidency, his chief strategist, Stephen K. Bannon, promised a "deconstruction of the administrative state." But Trump installed people in other key roles who ended up telling him that more radical ideas were unworkable or illegal. This irritated him, and in the final year of his presidency, he told aides he was fed up with being constrained by subordinates.

Now, Trump is laying out a far more expansive vision of power if he manages to win a second term. "And in contrast with his disorganized transition after his surprise 2016 victory, he now benefits from a well-funded policymaking infrastructure, led by former officials who did not break with him after his attempts to overturn the 2020 election and the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol."

One idea the people around Trump have developed centers on bringing independent agencies under his thumb. Congress created these specialized technocratic agencies inside the executive branch and delegated to them some of its power to make rules for society. But it did so on the condition that it was not simply handing off that power to presidents to wield like kings -- putting commissioners atop them whom presidents appoint but generally cannot fire before their terms end, while using its control of their budgets to keep them partly accountable to lawmakers as well. (Agency actions are also subject to court review.)

"If Mr. Trump and his allies get another shot at power, the independence of the Federal Reserve -- an institution Mr. Trump publicly railed at as president -- could be up for debate."

"Mr. Trump himself has characterized his intentions rather differently -- promising on his campaign website to 'find and remove the radicals who have infiltrated the federal Department of Education' and listing a litany of targets at a rally last month."

Nefarious Republican Plans

In the article *'Project 2025': plan to dismantle US climate policy for next Republican president*, rightwing groups reveal a wish list of proposals for the next conservative president that would result in environmental protections being gutted.

Syndicated columnist and astute political activist Jim Hightower assessed this news, and speculated, "When your political opponents push extremist public policies that would be disastrous for America, should you wring your hands in dread ... or applaud (due to the electoral political suicide that should result)?"

"Consider 'Project 2025', put together by former Trump officials and the Koch brothers' network of billionaire plutocrats. Their strategy is to win the presidency next year by demonizing all environmental protections and promising to halt all national efforts to cope with the obvious crises of climate change. Their proposals include *repealing* regulations that curb fossil fuel pollution, *terminating* our nation's transition to renewable energy, *shutting down* all environmental protection agencies, *encouraging* more oil and gas drilling and use, and *promoting* the deadly delusion that global warming is not a real problem."

"Moreover, they intend to implement Project 2025 in the first 180 days of a right-wing Republican's presidential term -- obviously anticipating that Donald Trump will be that president. 'We are not tinkering at the edges,' brags a far-out right-wing group that instigated the scheme, 'We are writing a battle plan and we are marshalling our forces.' They've already drawn up a list of agencies and policies they'll begin eliminating on Day One, and they've readied a list of some 20,000 right-wing henchmen to put on the federal payroll immediately to enforce their plan."

"If this sounds ludicrous, it is. But it's actually happening, for the Republican Party has decided to be ludicrous. As the director of Project 2025 told the New York Times, 'This is where the conservative movement sits at this time.'"

"Maybe, but it damn sure won't sit well with the American people, who're presently suffering the hellish ravages of our rapidly overheating climate. Indeed, here's a great chance for Democrats to demonstrate their bipartisan spirit by doing all they can to publicize the Republicans' let-it-burn global warming policy."

"An alliance of rightwing groups has crafted an extensive presidential proposal to bolster the planet-heating oil and gas industry and hamstringing the energy transition, it has emerged."

"Against a backdrop of record-breaking heat and floods this year, the \$22 million endeavor, Project 2025, was convened by the notorious rightwing, climate-denying think-tank the Heritage Foundation, which has ties to fossil fuel billionaire Charles Koch."

Lisa Friedman wrote on August 4, 2023 in her article *A Republican 2024 Climate Strategy: More Drilling, Less Clean Energy*, that Project 2025 would stop attempts to cut the pollution that is heating the planet, and encourage more emissions. "During a summer of scorching heat that has broken records and forced Americans to confront the reality of climate change, conservatives are laying the groundwork for a future Republican administration that would dismantle efforts to slow global warming."

"The move is part of a sweeping strategy dubbed Project 2025 that Paul Dans of the Heritage Foundation, the conservative think tank organizing the effort, has called a 'battle plan' for the first 180 days of a future Republican presidency."

"The climate and energy provisions would be among the most severe swings away from current federal policies. The plan calls for shredding regulations to curb greenhouse gas pollution from cars, oil and gas wells and power plants, dismantling almost every clean energy program in the federal government and boosting the production of fossil fuels -- the burning of which is the chief cause of planetary warming."

"The New York Times asked the leading Republican presidential candidates whether they support the Project 2025 strategy but none of the campaigns responded. Still, several of the architects are veterans of the Trump administration, and their recommendations match positions held by former President Donald J. Trump, the current front-runner for the 2024 Republican nomination."

"The \$22 million project also includes personnel lists and a transition strategy in the event a Republican wins the 2024 election. The nearly 1,000-page plan, which would reshape the executive branch to place more power into the president's hands, outlines changes for nearly every agency across the government."

"The Heritage Foundation worked on the plan with dozens of conservative groups ranging from the Heartland Institute, which has denied climate science, to the Competitive Enterprise Institute, which says climate change does not endanger the survival of civilization or the habitability of the planet."

"Mr. Dans said the Heritage Foundation delivered the blueprint to every Republican presidential hopeful. While polls have found that young Republicans are worried about global warming, Mr. Dans said that the feedback he has received confirms the blueprint reflects where the majority of party leaders stand."

"Benji Backer, executive chairman and founder of the American Conservation Coalition, a group of young Republicans who want climate action, said he felt Project 2025 was wrongheaded." He added, "If they were smart about this issue they would have taken approach that said 'the Biden administration has done things in a way they don't agree with but here's our vision'. Instead they remove it from being a priority."

"He noted climate change is a real concern among young Republicans. By a nearly two-to-one margin, polls have found, Republicans aged 18 to 39 years old are more likely to agree that 'human activity contributes a great deal to climate change,' and that the federal government has a role to play in curbing it."

"Of Project 2025, he said, 'This sort of approach on climate is not acceptable to the next generation.'"

Roughly four million people turn 18 every year, and this means there will be 16 million eligible new voters in 2024 compared to 2020. Youth voter turnout has been at record highs since 2018, and young citizens tend to support climate action for a livable future, and oppose easily available ownership of lethal assault weapons that contribute to the on-going epidemic of mass shootings. Some of them choose to lead protests against racial injustices, and most recognize how badly many of our representatives are treating everyone in the future.

Let's encourage and incentivize every person under 30 to register to vote -- and to vote in every election!

"There is no Planet B." There is only one Earth, so we all must do everything we can to conserve the environment now, like by taking bold steps to mitigate climate change and to protect natural ecosystems and healthy habitats and biological diversity.

Moral Turpitude

We all should be aware of the far-reaching guilt people today bear for the catastrophically harmful and devastatingly mindless legacy we are leaving to our children, grandchildren and all of our heirs in future generations.

Further Merited Criticisms of Project 2025

The nefarious Republican scheme Project 2025 "calls on the government to stop trying to make automobiles more fuel efficient and to block states from adopting California's stringent automobile pollution standards."

"Project 2025 does not offer any proposals for curbing the greenhouse gas emissions that are dangerously heating the planet and which scientists have said must be sharply and quickly reduced to avoid the most catastrophic impacts."

"Asked what the country should do to combat climate change, Diana Furchtgott-Roth, director of the Heritage Foundation's energy and climate center, said 'I really hadn't thought about it in those terms' and then offered that Americans should use more natural gas."

"Natural gas produces half the carbon dioxide emissions of coal when burned. But gas facilities frequently leak methane, a greenhouse gas that is much more powerful than carbon dioxide in the short term and has emerged as a growing concern among climate scientists."

"The blueprint said the next Republican president would help repeal the Inflation Reduction Act, the 2022 law that is offering \$370 billion for wind, solar, nuclear, green hydrogen and electric vehicle technology, with most of the new investments taking place in Republican-led states."

"The plan calls for shuttering a Department of Energy office that has \$400 billion in loan authority to help emerging green technologies. It would make it more difficult for solar, wind and other renewable power -- the fastest growing energy source in the United States -- to be added to the grid. Climate change would no longer be considered an issue worthy of discussion on the National Security Council, and allied nations would be encouraged to buy and use more fossil fuels rather than renewable energy."

"The blueprint throws open the door to drilling inside the pristine Arctic wilderness, promises to expand extraction of oil and gas and declares the federal government has an 'obligation to develop vast oil and gas and coal resources' on America's public lands."

"Climate advocates said the Republican strategy would take the country in the wrong direction even as heat waves, drought and wildfires worsen because of emissions."

"This agenda would be laughable if the consequences of it weren't so dire,' said Christy Goldfuss, chief policy impact officer for the Natural Resources Defense Council, an environmental group."

"Mr. Dans said a mandate of Project 2025 is to 'investigate whether the dimensions of climate change exist and what can actually be done.' As for the influence of burning fossil fuels, he said, 'I think the science is still out on that quite frankly.'"

"In actuality, it is not. The top scientists in the United States concluded in an exhaustive study produced during the Trump administration that humans -- the cars we drive, the power plants we operate, the forests we destroy -- are to blame. 'There is no convincing alternative explanation supported by the extent of the observational evidence,' scientists wrote."

Project 2025 notably would also "restart a quest for something climate denialists have long considered their holy grail: reversal of a 2009 scientific finding at the Environmental Protection Agency that says carbon dioxide emissions are a danger to public health."

"Yes, repeal science, that's the Republican fix."

There are grave consequences of having Republicans engage in a war on science, as told by Dr. Peter Hotez in his new book *The Deadly Rise of Anti-Science: A Scientist's Warning*. Politically-motivated misinformation promoted

against getting vaccinated by right-wing politicians and broadcasters (and anti-vaxxer groups on social media platforms) has unnecessarily cost an estimated 200,000 to 300,000 lives during the global pandemic.

Joe Biden is the President

This is a story about forward thinking compared to backwards driving.

Here is one of the most extraordinary contrasts in history.

Democrats touted "Bidenomics" and took a victory lap on August 16, 2023, which was the first anniversary of the passage of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). This law is transforming the U.S. economy -- and not a single Republican in the U.S. Senate or the House voted for it.

"The IRA was the eventual form President Joe Biden's initial 'Build Back Better' plans took. It offered to lower Americans' energy costs with a 30% tax credit for energy-efficient windows, heat pumps, or newer models of appliances; capped the cost of drugs at \$2,000 per year for people on Medicare; and made healthcare premiums fall for certain Americans by expanding the Affordable Care Act."

"By raising taxes on the very wealthy and on corporations and bringing the Internal Revenue Service back up to full strength so that it can crack down on tax cheating, as well as saving the government money by permitting it to negotiate drug prices with pharmaceutical companies, the IRA was expected to raise \$738 billion. That, plus about \$891 billion from other sources, enabled the law to make the largest investment ever in addressing climate change while still bringing down the federal government's annual deficit."

"This is a BFD," former President Barack Obama tweeted a year ago. "Thanks, Obama," Biden responded.

"The law has driven significant investment in U.S. manufacturing. Indeed, the chief executive officer of U.S. Steel recently said the law should be renamed the 'Manufacturing Renaissance Act', as manufacturers return previously offshored production to the U.S. That same shift has brought supply chains back to the U.S. These changes have meant new, well-paid manufacturing jobs that have been concentrated in Republican-dominated states and in historically disadvantaged communities." Something like 70% of the investments made under the Inflation Reduction Act are being done in red states, despite the fact that politicians representing Republican-led states unanimously opposed the law, for cynical partisan oppositional reasons.

"Scientists Alicia Zhao and Haewon McJeon, who recently published an article in *Science*, wrote that the IRA 'brings the US significantly closer to meeting its 2030 climate target [of cutting greenhouse gas emissions to 50-52% below 2005 levels], taking expected emissions from 25-31% below 2005 levels down to 33-40% below.'"

Republican presidential candidates took shots at the Inflation Reduction Act on the August 16 anniversary of the law's passage. Former South Carolina governor Nikki Haley actually called it "a communist manifesto". Oh, great, even the once sensible Republican woman governor has gone to the dark side of deviously Orwellian sloganeering and hyperbolic distortions of the truth.

Democrats, for their part, pointed out that many Republicans have been eager to take credit for IRA investments in their districts without mentioning they voted against the legislation -- or that they are still trying to repeal it.

The Importance of Voting for Democrats in 2024

Elections have critically important consequences. To paraphrase excellent observations contained in a Facebook post about choices voters make when voting for president, votes for a Democrat and not a Republican mean seeing the big picture and voting for a whole constellation of important priorities. Democrats support stronger protections of the environment, clean air, clean water and a stable climate. They support protections afforded by the Voting Rights Act, and women's reproductive rights, and social safety net programs like the Affordable Care Act, Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid. Voting for a Democrat is also voting for progressive policies like an increase in minimum wages, adequate funding for nutritional assistance (food stamps), support for workers' collective bargaining rights and protections of young Dreamers and lower prescription drug costs, as well as for marriage equality, infrastructure spending, and maintaining funding for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Voting for a Democrat and not a Republican is taking a stand for a more ethical Supreme Court that is less politically partisan and less dominated by precedent-overturing conservatives and ethics-deficient Justices who respectable ProPublica reveals give more than just the appearance of cashing in on their little-constrained power and lifelong positions.

And supporting and voting for Republicans is choosing to weaken our democracy, give dangerously excess power to far-right factions, scheming demagogues and neo-fascists. And it is a form of pandering with excessively obsequious slavishness to rich people and giant corporations, to the woeful detriment of the general welfare and security of the people.

George Orwell Chimes In

Jim Hightower writes that George Orwell's classic novel 1984 tells of a far-right totalitarian clique that uses "newspeak" and "doublethink" to impose a rigid, anti-democratic doctrine on society. "Their regime held power through mind control -- they had T, a 'Ministry of Truth', for perverting language and manipulating facts, while their 'Thought Police' enforced ideological purity and suppressed dissent."

"Thirty-nine years later, here comes a clique of theocratic extremists in our country using Orwellian manipulation in its crusade to take control over every woman's personal reproductive rights. Having seized the Supreme Court and practically the entire Republican Party, these present-day autocrats are now demanding that state and national lawmakers enforce the group's ultimate dictate: *A total ban on abortions, even in cases of rape and incest.*"

"To their amazement, however, the great majority of Americans (even Republicans) think abortion ought to be generally available, with each woman deciding what's best for her. Moreover, the idea of Big Brother imposing a federal ban is massively unpopular."

IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH, wrote George Orwell in his dystopian novel 1984, a cautionary tale demonstrating how 'anodyne bureaucratic jargon' can be used to manipulate the masses into passivity and acceptance of oppression and absurd policies.

Devious Distractions by Divide-to-Conquer Rogues

MAGA extremist, Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-Ga.) tweeted on Feb. 20, 2023: "We need a national divorce. We need to separate by red states and blue states and shrink the federal government. Everyone I talk to says this. From the sick and disgusting woke culture issues shoved down our throats to the Democrat's traitorous America Last policies, we are done."

In speaking of a secession-style "national divorce", she is suggesting an alternative to a violent civil war, but talks threateningly of using "our Second Amendment rights ... to defend ourselves from a tyrannical government." Violent rhetoric and threats can lead to actual violence, so it is wrong for people to engage in it.

"Precisely because of such people, the United States actually *is* at risk of civil war -- more than at any point in recent history", wrote one expert on the matter. "As I have noted, the Trump presidency and the Capitol insurrection caused the country to lose its status as a 'full democracy' for the first time since 1800, according to an index used by the CIA to track instability and political violence abroad. A partial democracy, which the United States now is, faces three times the risk of falling into civil war."

Another notorious MAGA Republican, Rep. Lauren Boebert of Colorado, "is everything that's wrong with Washington: Extremism. Dysfunction. Self-interest. She's the epitome of the angertainment industry." Colorado voters, please throw this irresponsible fanatic out of office in November 2024!

Political violence in the U.S. is at its highest point since the 1970s, according to a Reuters special report. And many Republicans are fostering anger and hatred and more-or-less encouraging political violence.

Disgraced Florida Rep. Matt Gaetz recently told an audience of folks at the Iowa State Fair that they are threatened, that Democrats "are coming for all of us," and that the political changes needed to save them cannot come from elections, reform or legislation. "Only through force", he declared, can change in Washington D.C. occur.

Ruth Ben-Ghiat, an expert on authoritarianism, noted: "This is language of coups, and it is the language of Fascism. Literally." She goes on to trace the movement of the original Fascist, Benito Mussolini, 100 years ago in Italy, and his rhetoric rationalizing the use of force. He engaged in "building up his personality cult and using violence against the opposition", imposing totalitarian rule, crushing political and intellectual opposition, and figuring out how to rig elections to consolidate his power.

"Consent is as changeable as the sands of the seashore," Mussolini mused in *Force and Consent* in 1923, concluding that a consent-based political system means having to deal with "discontented people." ... "And how are you to prevent this discontent from growing and become a danger to the safety of the State? You prevent it by means of force; by surrounding the mass with force; by employing this force without pity when it is necessary to do so."

In *Force and Consent*, Mussolini reveals a dawning of his strategy to stay in power: "You prevent changes you don't want -- like those malcontents voting you out of office -- through violent action that suppresses and silences 'consent'. That's dictatorship, and Mussolini's lasted over twenty years."

In the U.S. today, it is far-right factions that present the most serious threat of totalitarian abuses of power, not liberals. And they employ the tried-and-true methods of the Authoritarian Playbook to achieve this nefarious objective, succeeding by distracting people and pitting them against each other. In my essay *Democracy, and the Problematic and Pathological Perils of "Electoral Autocracies"*, many important insights are conveyed about the grave undesirability of authoritarianism in the USA, and in countries around the world today. By this reference, this content is included herein. Also, extremist factions cunningly tend to use tactics as described at length in *Divide-to-Conquer Roguery* (find these essays in the Earth Manifesto online).

I hold this truth to be self-evident, that an expansively free, open, equitable, healthy, peaceable and sustainable society is vastly preferable to one ruled by those who are control-obsessed, and who demonstrate withered consciences and a dictatorial bent.

"Fascism is a far-right, authoritarian, ultranationalist political ideology and movement," explains Wikipedia. It is "characterized by a dictatorial leader, centralized autocracy, militarism, forcible suppression of opposition, belief in a natural social hierarchy, subordination of individual interests for the perceived good of the nation and race, and strong regimentation of society and the economy." Fascism poses terrible threats to our cherished liberties, and to our rights, general well-being, and personal and national security.

Elections can have major consequences, and 2024 could well determine whether or not our nearly 250-year-old democratic republic will survive. One of the most serious consequences of Trump having gotten elected in 2016 was that the ideological makeup of the Supreme Court has become a supermajority of "conservatives". Understand this in its full consequential skullduggery and undesirability by reading my new essay *Unbalanced: Supreme Court Politics, Chicanery and Corruption*. This essay provides highly valuable perspective, as does my essay *Calamitous Consequences of Success of a Secret Conspiratorial Scheme to Capture the Courts*.

Trumpian Intrigue

"Everything faded into mist," wrote George Orwell in 1984: "The past was erased, the erasure was forgotten, the lie became truth."

Trump has a magnetic ability to agitate, anger and deceive people, and he has been aided in this by Fox News and other even further far-right media outlets and inadequately-moderated social media platforms that emotionally manipulate, scare, brainwash and delude people into believing twisted ways of seeing and understanding facts, evidence and reality. These influences support political absolutism and minority rule, and even rationalize and promote political violence.

Trump summonsed all his most loyal and extremist supporters to the Capitol on January 6, 2021 by tweeting in December 2020, six weeks after having lost the election: "Be there, it will be wild." And he engaged in a five-part plan in an effort to cling to power after losing the election. This included illegally having his co-conspirators organize fraudulent slates of electors in 7 targeted swing states (Georgia, Michigan, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Arizona, Nevada and New Mexico).

He acted as a Big Lie perpetrating instigator boss, inciting the January 6 mob to lawbreaking and violence. He deserves to be the one who pays the stiffest penalty for being the driving force behind the attempt to prevent the peaceful transfer of power to a duly elected new president.

Only by holding individuals and leaders accountable for inciting violence and attempting a coup can we prevent future tyrannical efforts to illegitimately grab power (and abuse it, in objectionably burdensome and often harmful ways).

Sadly, it is only the footsoldiers of the attempted coup on January 6 who have so far suffered the harshest penalties for their participation in assaulting Capitol police and breaking into the Capitol -- doing the bidding of Trump to try to prevent the orderly and peaceful transfer of power. More than 1,100 persons have been charged with crimes committed during the riot, and more than 630 have pleaded guilty to federal charges. A number of members of the Proud Boys, "an exclusively male North American far-right neo-fascist militant organization", have been found guilty of the very serious (traitorous) crime of seditious conspiracy, along with leaders of the Oath Keepers, an extremist anti-government militia.

In our system of justice, strong deterrents are needed to discourage coup participants from trying again to use political violence to grab power and defy rules of law and overthrow constitutional order.

Donald Trump demands that people be loyal to him, but in a stark situational contrast, he perfidiously demonstrates a treacherous disloyalty himself, readily throwing anyone under the bus when it suits his selfish goals, convenience, mood or egomaniacal urges.

The January 6 riot was a "cult leader rescue operation". Followers were beseeched by one of history's lousiest losers to "Stop the Steal" (which in Orwellian doublespeak meant "Steal the Election"). The devious Trumpster made countless crybaby sore loser appeals of having been victimized, and displayed his malignant narcissism in zealously trying to overthrow American democracy for his own power, self-centered glory, egoic fame, despicable notoriety and huge fundraising hauls from duped believers.

Republicans are trying to discredit President Biden not only by denying he legitimately won the 2020 election but also by projecting their own wrongdoing onto Joe Biden with wild accusations about the "Biden crime family" and fictitious allegations that his tenure in office has been a disaster, when in fact most metrics of job growth, inflation, legislation passed, effective engagement in foreign relations, etc. reveal a far truer and more positive story.

Conservatives really play a manipulative Playbook when they accuse others of exactly what they are most guilty of themselves. Psychologists have a name for such offensive defense mechanisms: PROJECTION. In its malignant forms, "the ego defends itself against disowned and highly negative parts of the self by denying their existence in themselves and attributing them to others, breeding misunderstanding and causing untold interpersonal damage." And in this situation, it is not merely a projection of one's own thoughts, motivations, desires and feelings onto others, but a means of engaging in blame-shifting for wrongdoing.

Historical Tales

In October 1964, Ronald Reagan defended Barry Goldwater and his brand of Republicanism, saying in his famous *A Time for Choosing* speech: "You and I are told increasingly we have to choose between a left or right. Well I'd like to suggest there is no such thing as a left or right. There's only an up or down -- [up is] man's old-aged dream, the ultimate in individual freedom consistent with law and order -- or down to the ant heap of totalitarianism. And regardless of their sincerity, their humanitarian motives, those who would trade our freedom for security have embarked on this downward course."

Reagan concluded this long speech with the vaulting words, "You and I have a rendezvous with destiny. We'll preserve for our children this, the last best hope of man on earth, or we'll sentence them to take the last step into a thousand years of darkness."

This was hyperbole, and much water has flowed under the proverbial bridge since those days before Reagan entered politics, and today "conservatives" on the far right pose the most serious threats of totalitarianism, much more than liberals or anti-fascists on the far-left.

The Republican self-described dirty trickster Roger Stone used similar hyperbolic rhetoric during an appearance at a Reawaken America tour in 2021. He declared, "We are in an epic struggle. This is not a struggle between two different political parties that both love America, but just have different governing philosophies. Don't believe it. This is a struggle between dark and light. This is a struggle between the godly and the godless. This is a struggle between good and evil. And if we fail, America will step off into a thousand years of darkness."

This is absurd emotion-manipulating hyperbole, and evilly turgid with danger. Such twisted spin surely represents a serious threat to our freedoms, well-being and security.

Democracy dies in darkness and misinformation and shrewd deceit that allows the rich and those agitated by demagoguery to impose their imperious will on the citizenry.

One pathological consequence of voting for Republican politicians is that it gives support to persons powerfully opposed to cleaner energy, environmental protections, gun safety, young immigrant Dreamers, reproductive freedom to choose, fairer more progressively-graduated tax plans, and anti-corruption investigators, prosecutors and judges. Etc., etc.

Political Extremism

There has been a veritable explosion of right-wing conferences and events for *MAGA* zealots in recent years. At these events, "the *GOP* marketplace incentivizes and rewards the worst actors the party has to offer, and distills it to a roux of disinformation and commercial opportunity for all who participate."

These events showcase politicians like Matt Gaetz, Ted Cruz, Josh Hawley, Ron DeSantis and Trump, and conspiracy theorists, QAnon devotees, white supremacists and right-wing stalwarts like MyPillow's Mike Lindell, along with "disgraced *MAGA*-world politicians like former national security advisor Lt. General Michael Flynn, Roger Stone, campaign operative George Papadopoulos, and right-wing filmmaker Dinesh D'Souza, all of whom were pardoned by Donald Trump for various crimes."

These events are lucrative "politics as entertainment", according to a Florida lawyer and former federal prosecutor and ex-Republican "who has been chronicling the swell of *GOP* extremism via a popular Twitter feed that often showcases video clips from these events." He says, "They're making rock stars out of these people, but a lot of them are nut jobs."

These events began long ago in 1974 with CPAC, a political action conference "designed to train a new generation of activists to fight the culture wars and reenergizing conservatives demoralized by the Watergate scandal."

"CPAC isn't just a showcase for the Republican Party's brightest stars and biggest ideas, it also offers a close-up view of the ugly underbelly of the conservative movement -- the hacks and hucksters who helped lead Republicans astray." Astray, that is, into radical extremism that threatens to bring an ignominious and baleful end to democratic fairness and our constitutional democracy.

Right now, Donald Trump and Ron DeSantis are fighting to be crowned King of the Extremists -- and meanwhile, their followers in the House are grinding government to a halt with budget brinksmanship, poison pill social policy inclusions in funding bills, and unwarranted impeachment politics.

Future Developments

Former Texas Republican Rep. Will Hurd recently said "It's time to move beyond dealing with the former president's baggage." He added, "Another day, another indictment, and another example of how the former president's baggage will hand Joe Biden reelection if Trump is the nominee. This is further evidence that Trump knew he lost the 2020 election and was ready to do anything it took to cling to power. He will use this latest indictment as another opportunity to manipulate Americans into paying his legal bills."

MAGA primary voters bizarrely don't yet seem to be demoralized by all of Trump's wrongdoing, but that is likely to

change in coming months as the damning details emerge of his 4 serious felony indictments, and as criminal trials take place in Washington D.C., Georgia and New York.

The latest indictment in Georgia against Trump and 18 co-conspirators "is much bigger than Watergate," said John Dean, Richard Nixon's lawyer during Watergate. "It's of a whole different dimension. It goes to the very foundation of democracy. Nixon abused some powers, he exceeded his authority when he shouldn't, but he wasn't taking on the basics of the country, whereas Trump wanted to stay in office, he wanted to use Georgia and abuse Georgia as part of that plan, and so this is very different and much more serious and much more troubling."

Perhaps the indictments for attempting to prevent the peaceful transfer of power to a legitimately elected new president "will finally convince the Beltway political media to treat Trump's treason as a serious and damning story unto itself, and not as one of many factors in a never-ending horse race."

"Personally, I'm mostly hoping that we get to see Rudy Giuliani on the stand," humorously quipped one observer, "preferably after he drinks his lunch. What a coda for one of the sleaziest public figures of the past half-century."

Political commentator Charlie Sykes said the GOP will continue to plunge only one way while it remains in thrall to Donald Trump, and that's downward. As told in the article *Conservative Pundit Offers Grim Prediction About Republicans and Donald Trump*, Charlie Sykes acknowledged on MSNBC's *Morning Joe* that it was "easy to dismiss" Trump as a "narcissistic clown" but said it is "hard to understate the impact that he's had on our political standards."

"You are seeing a full-out attack, not just on the culture of facts, which we had back in 2016, but now on all of the institutions of our constitutional republic, he continued, noting how Trump's rival 2024 Republican candidates are also now sowing distrust."

"It is rock-solid certain that Donald Trump will continue to make the threats, will continue to make the insults," said Sykes, the founder of *The Bulwark* news network. "Everything that's happening now will get worse, and the Republican Party and the evangelical church will go along with it."

"This has long-term importance. Things like this, when they're broken, they are hard to put back together," he added.

Morning Joe co-host Joe Scarborough agreed, saying: "If Republicans keep this line of thinking, continue their support for Donald Trump, they need not fool themselves. A second Trump administration would destroy the Department of Justice, would destroy the FBI, would destroy the federal government's rule of law, would destroy judicial independence. It would destroy the third branch of America's government, it would rip to shreds Madisonian democracy."

"They need to understand what they're doing, and perhaps they do," Scarborough added. "I'm just trying to figure out what is so important about this former reality TV host that they're willing to literally throw away Madisonian democracy to defend him."

Note that the national security expert Miles Taylor, author of the famous "Anonymous" essay warning against Trump from inside the Trump administration back in September 2018, has written a new book, *Blowback - A Warning to Save Democracy from the Next Trump*.

In *Anonymous*, Taylor anonymously exposed Trump's character defects, incompetence, erratic behaviors in office, and the chaos in his administration. He described Trump as unstable and manifestly unfit for office, and said that he witnessed shocking acts of corruption while serving in the administration. And he gave "alarming views of Trump's own Cabinet members -- some of whom contemplated invoking the Twenty-Fifth Amendment to remove the commander in chief amid the instability."

Taylor also wrote a book, still anonymously, titled *A Warning* just before the 2020 presidential election in which he urged voters not to re-elect Trump. He subsequently revealed his identity as having been the person who wrote the *Anonymous* article, and *A Warning*.

In *Blowback - A Warning to Save Democracy from the Next Trump*, Taylor says that a next Trump will come along, likely after the Big Loser of the last three national elections is gone from the scene -- and it will probably be a man who is savvier, more competent, more formidable, and a greater threat to our freedoms and well-being and the survival of our Constitutional democratic republic. Voters, beware!

Trump not only wants to silence dissent, he wants revenge. He is a master at the politics of personal destruction, so Taylor has received numerous threats for having made his critiques, and for sharing details of the way Trump has put Party over Country -- and Self over all. Trump has been a life-long bully, and now excels at political intimidation, as revealed by how cowed and cowardly Republican politicians are, and even the candidates running against him in the 2024 election primaries for the Republican nomination.

A Mushroom Cloud Conception

The current dire situation of our democracy reminds me of a political cartoon by Gary Larson on *The Far Side* that showed two guys in a rowboat on a lake watching as multiple nuclear mushroom clouds billow on the horizon. "One fisherman gawks, cigarette dangling loosely from his lips, head cocked slightly back. He has obviously just blurted out the obvious question. His companion, far less interested in the imminent destruction of the planet than what it means for their outing, cuts right through all the nonessential parts. The caption reads: "I'll tell you what this means, Norm -- no size restrictions, and screw the limit."

How much longer will Republicans be able to get away with their system rigging, staunch opposition to win-win progressive solutions, discriminatory voter restrictions, obstruction of justice, derelictions of duty, violations of constitutional provisions, and engaging in betrayals of the public trust?

Article: Threats to Elections Didn't End on January 6

For the first time, a former president is facing criminal charges for a wide-ranging conspiracy to thwart American democracy. In painstaking detail, the indictment recounts Trump's scheme "to overturn the legitimate results of the 2020 presidential election by using knowingly false claims of election fraud." Regardless of how the case proceeds, one thing is already clear: the attacks on our democracy did not end on January 6, 2021.

The plot to overturn the 2020 election has spawned an ongoing election denial movement that is undermining voting rights, weakening our electoral system, and making it more vulnerable to future attacks. This plan not only builds off the playbook used by Trump and his co-conspirators in 2020, but also invokes the same lies about voter fraud and a "stolen" election detailed in the indictment. Although these thoroughly discredited lies continue to unravel as more and more of their purveyors face accountability, the damage being done in their name is far from over.

Perhaps most jarring are the attacks on election officials and election workers. Since 2020, concocted false claims of voter fraud and election "irregularities" have prompted widespread harassment and threats of violence against election officials and their families. For example, violent threats forced one top local election official in Arizona's Maricopa County into hiding to protect his safety -- and that of his family -- while he presided over the 2022 vote count.

His experience was not an anomaly. A Brennan Center survey of local election officials showed that nearly one in three have faced harassment, abuse or threats for simply doing their jobs. Forty-five percent expressed concern for the physical safety of their colleagues in future elections, and one in five reported that they personally feared being physically assaulted on the job.

Predictably, this fear has led to an exodus among experienced election officials. Across the country, particularly in battleground states, turnover has rapidly increased. At least one in five said they plan to leave by 2024. In North Carolina alone, turnover has forced at least 40 of the state's 100 counties to replace their head election official.

Alarming, in many instances the people replacing these professionals are election deniers themselves. This amplifies another threat to the stability of our elections: internal attacks on the security of our election administration structure. Following the 2020 election, these "insider threats" included at least 17 incidents in which election officials gave election deniers (who sought to uncover widespread but fictitious fraud) unauthorized access to voting equipment and data. For example, Tina Peters, former clerk of Mesa County, Colorado, has been

found guilty of criminal charges for her role in facilitating a security breach of the county's Dominion voting machines. As a result, the state announced that the county's voting equipment would have to be decertified and entirely replaced before the next election.

Election deniers are also weakening our electoral system by strategically undermining voting rights. This tactic is straight out of the Trump campaign's 2020 playbook, described succinctly in the indictment by Jack Smith as an effort to "discount legitimate votes and subvert the election result." Since 2020, at least 28 states have passed 65 laws making it harder to vote. And these efforts show no sign of slowing down. In 2023, 14 red states have enacted restrictive voting laws.

Regardless of their impact on election outcomes, these new laws cause significant, measurable harm by preventing hundreds of thousands of eligible voters from participating in elections, and they target voters of color disproportionately. Not surprisingly, the turnout gap between white and Black voters is now the largest in any presidential or midterm election since at least 2000.

"Election deniers have also generated a new threat to free and fair elections: election subversion legislation that enables partisan actors to meddle in election administration. Most troubling are bills that would empower state legislators or their partisan allies to overturn election results -- bills that thankfully have not yet passed. But bills that have been enacted are also problematic, including laws that give partisan actors direct control over election administrators or election administration decisions. Since the Brennan Center first started tracking these laws in 2021, at least 28 have passed."

"Undoubtedly, Trump's indictment is a critical step in reckoning with the plot to overturn the 2020 election. But we also need to confront the ongoing anti-democratic attacks that are an outgrowth of that plot. In addition to holding perpetrators accountable, we must shore up our election system so it is less susceptible to attack. That includes passing stronger legal safeguards to protect against efforts to disenfranchise voters and subvert election results. Such protections are found in the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act and the Freedom to Vote Act, which was recently reintroduced in Congress, and similar bills in the states. It also includes robust judicial enforcement of the laws that are currently on the books. Our democracy is still on the line."

"Owning the Libs"

Paul Krugman wrote in his column in the New York Times on Jan. 6, 2023 that the hard-right politicians and many conservatives define themselves by their resentments. "And yes, I mean resentments rather than grievances. Grievances are about things you believe you deserve, and might be diminished if you get some of what you want. Resentment is about feeling that you're being looked down on, and can only be assuaged by hurting the people you, at some level, envy." He goes on to discuss the popularity on the right of efforts "to own the libs", which is a cynically obtuse effort to humiliate liberals even though it often means conservatives are in effect "cutting off their own noses to spite their faces."

"Two years ago on Jan. 6, 2021, the United States Capitol was attacked by a mob determined to stop Congress from certifying Joe Biden as President. They were armed and dangerous. Five people died. It's a miracle that more did not -- including members of Congress and the Vice President whom the mob had targeted." ("Hang Mike Pence.")

"January 6 is a day that should live in infamy. But Trump has not been held accountable for his central role in the attack. In fact, he is now again running for President ... and he remains the most formidable force in the Republican Party."

"Nor have the members of Congress who were likely involved in the insurrection been held accountable." In fact, extremists have never had more power over the U.S. government than they are exercising now in the House of Representatives.

"On January 6, 2023, two years after the ugly and violent insurrectionary attack on the Capitol by Trump supporters, Senator Elizabeth Warren reflected: 'The coup attempt failed that day, but the threat isn't over. The insurrection didn't begin, or end, on January 6, 2021. It was one piece of an ongoing scheme to defy the will of the American people.'"

"A serious inquiry would have to ask uncomfortable questions about infiltration of the police by ultra-right elements. The Jan. 6 Committee would have had to investigate 'blue sympathy' for white supremacists."

"January 6 was not a one-day, one-time event -- It was the product of years of anti-democratic backsliding engineered by right-wing forces: The lies, racism, and propaganda of Fox News and the far-right media ecosystem. Years-long maneuvers by Republicans to disenfranchise voters of color. Big Business dominance of our politics and economy that has left many voters alienated and hurting. Extreme racial and partisan gerrymandering that has led to the election of far-right extremists that traffic in conspiracy and fascism. An embrace of authoritarianism by Donald Trump and the Trump cult."

"And here's the most important thing: We are not out of the woods. The lunacy going on *right now* in the House of Representatives is a direct continuation of the trends that brought us January 6."

"It is very tempting to dismiss all of this as a clown show. That would be a profound mistake. Fascism often rises amidst buffoonery and farce."

"Reversing all these trends -- and deepening and expanding our democracy -- must be our guiding light. And accountability for Donald Trump is central to that effort."

Robert Reich has incisively explained that the real battle for America "isn't between the left and right, or even between Republicans and Democrats. It's between the oligarchy -- corporate and Wall Street moneyed interests -- and everybody else."

"The oligarchy doesn't want to destroy government. It needs government subsidies, loan guarantees, bailouts, and contracts. It just wants lower taxes (which requires less government spending) and fewer regulations."

"Most basically, it wants to continue to siphon off more of the economy's total gains. To do so, it needs the *MAGA* cultural warriors to keep America divided over *non-economic* issues (abortion, gay rights, immigration, voting rights, religious freedom) so most Americans won't look up and see where all the money has gone."

"This was the coalition and the strategy Trump relied on. The oligarchy financed Trump Republicans. In return, the oligarchs got lower taxes and regulatory rollbacks, while Trump and his *MAGAs* distracted the public with culture wars and warriors."

(Former) Speaker Kevin McCarthy and His Treachery

Immediately after members of Congress got back to Washington D.C. after the August 2023 recess, Rep. Josh Harder observed that Kevin McCarthy had had all summer to figure out how to stand up to the *GOP* extremists who threatened and threaten to shut down the government. "He got nowhere and now has *NO PLAN* on how to keep our government open and working. It's genuinely insane."

"Instead of talking about how the government is going to shut down ... because of *GOP* extremists, McCarthy held a press conference announcing he's opening up an impeachment inquiry into President Biden."

"See what he's doing? He's holding a shiny object out to the press hoping they change the story (and giving extremists more of what they want). It's working and it's going to cause chaos in Washington."

"Congress has serious work to do, starting with keeping the government open for business! And yet, opening this inquiry just fans the flames of partisanship and makes it even less likely Congress does anything substantive."

"Look, I'm not surprised we ended up here. In fact, I predicted this right when McCarthy won the gavel."

"What I also know is that our government will not be able to function while extremist Republicans control the House of Representatives."

Scheming Republicans in the House have decided to try to impeach President Biden to hurt him politically and improve Republican chances of winning back the power of the presidency in the 2024 elections.

House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, who has subsequently been thrown out of his position as speaker for helping Democrats prevent a government shutdown -- said he was directing three House committees to open an impeachment inquiry into President Joe Biden. He and his successor Mike Johnson and House Republicans are doing

this for the same reason that they spent years on a fruitless Benghazi witch-hunt -- to hurt their political opponents in the shameless goal of gaining unmerited and domineering power.

Kevin McCarthy's role in this is ironic because he had suffered an embarrassing and serious political setback in October 2015 when he committed a political gaffe by admitting that Republicans used their multiple years-long investigations into the tragedy in Benghazi, in which four people were killed by members of an Islamic militant group, as a political weapon against then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to hurt her chances of winning the presidency in 2016.

"Everybody thought Hillary Clinton was unbeatable, right?", said the conniving McCarthy, at the time. "But we put together a Benghazi special committee, a select committee, and what are her numbers today? Her numbers are dropping, why? Because she's untrustable. But no one would have known any of that had happened."

Pressed on whether his flub -- which Democrats took as a mistaken admission of truth, and came ahead of the GOP caucus' election to select a replacement for then Speaker John Boehner -- showed that McCarthy would be a poor leader of the Party. So the gaffe forced him to withdraw his name from contention to replace John Boehner in October 2015, and Paul Ryan was chosen instead.

Then in September 2023, Kevin McCarthy gave in to threats from right-wing politicians in the House, and threw caution and propriety to the wind by setting in motion an impeachment inquiry into President Biden. McCarthy was removed from his position as Speaker by the extremists nonetheless, and chaos reigns in the House.

McCarthy's impeachment decision represented a major reversal and deep hypocritical inconsistency not long after he had told the conservative website Breitbart that he wouldn't open an impeachment inquiry without a vote of the full House. Republicans face skepticism and trepidation from many in the GOP due to the lack of evidence implicating the president in his son Hunter Biden's transgressions.

It also marks a reversal for Kevin McCarthy from 2019, when he inveighed against Democrats for initiating an impeachment inquiry into then-President Donald Trump, questioning the legitimacy of such an investigation by a partisan one-party vote. Democrats in the House eventually voted to authorize it despite Republicans being inalterably opposed to investigating Trump and his malfeasance in the Ukrainian extortion plot.

Reached for comment, the White House directed NBC News to a series of tweets by spokesman Ian Sams, who criticized McCarthy for having previously said he wouldn't announce an impeachment inquiry without a House vote. "The House GOP investigations have turned up no evidence of wrongdoing by POTUS," he said. "In fact, their own witnesses have testified to that, and their own documents have showed no link to POTUS."

Under the new speaker Mike Johnson, every House Republican did finally rally behind the politically charged process of authorizing an impeachment inquiry, in December 2023. Some politically vulnerable and centrist Republicans did so reluctantly, having expressed wariness about whether to launch a formal impeachment inquiry, seeing that the GOP doesn't have enough evidence to make the move.

Rep. Ken Buck, R-Colo., a member of the hard-line conservative House Freedom Caucus, argued that Republicans should not prioritize impeachment, noting the lack of evidence that GOP-led committees have produced from their investigations into Hunter Biden's foreign business dealings.

Kevin McCarthy had become House Speaker after eking out a victory on the 15th round of votes among House Republicans. One of the concessions the California Republican made to win the position was to agree to allow a single member of his party to start a process ousting the speaker. This is known as a "motion to vacate", and it left him at the mercy of some of the more fringe members of his conference as they look to the House leadership to accomplish their narrow-minded goals.

And on October 1, McCarthy was finally removed from being speaker at the instigation of Matt Gaetz, who stepped into the spotlight, looking almost evil and angry about McCarthy having blinked and voted on September 30 to prevent a government shutdown for 45 days, despite a large bipartisan majority agreeing with the action. He demanded that McCarthy go down in flames -- And so it came to pass.

Rep. Ken Buck had said on Sept. 10 that the GOP's focus should be on issues like border security, crime and

inflation -- not on impeaching Democratic President Joe Biden. "If we start going down these paths that really bear no fruit -- we are not going to get an impeachment through the Senate," Buck said. What really worried him was the recognition that waging an impeachment war without having reasonable cause will likely be politically damaging to those who insincerely wage this attack to gain partisan electoral advantages.

Just look at the absurdist history of presidential impeachments since 1998. House Republicans led by Newt Gingrich tried to weaponize government against President Bill Clinton in 1998 by impeaching him for the relatively minor offenses of telling little white lies about a consensual sexual dalliance with a White House intern, Monica Lewinsky. They charged him with "high crimes and misdemeanors" for lying about his relationship and trying to prevent their attempts to obtain "justice". The effort backfired on Republicans due to the obvious political gamesmanship involved.

Fast forward to the Trump era of really frequent lies and consequential abuses of presidential authority, and Democrats led by Nancy Pelosi had to impeach Trump twice for real "high crimes and misdemeanors", first after the Ukraine extortion abuse of power and brazen obstruction of Congress, and second for the brazenly consequential offense of inciting an insurrection in a coup attempt to stay in power after Trump lost the 2020 election.

Republicans are facing opposition from within their own ranks to impeaching President Joe Biden, and specifically from Senate Republicans, who would act as the jury in an impeachment trial. Some of them are deeply skeptical that House Republicans have gathered enough evidence to launch impeachment proceedings of Joe Biden over Hunter Biden's overseas business dealings -- "much less charge the president with committing high crimes or misdemeanors over them."

Even the right-wing whacko Sen. Tommy Tuberville of Alabama warned Republicans in the House, "You better have an ironclad case. (They do NOT have anything close.) When you go after a former president or a president, have all of your ducks in a row. Make sure you got what you need to have. Don't be guessing. Don't just be throwing mud." (Don't be making stuff up!)

Sen. Marco Rubio, a conservative Florida Republican, also warned House Republicans about the dangers of pursuing impeachment. While Rubio conceded that an impeachment inquiry can be useful to get information that the Biden administration has refused to turn over, he added, "I still think it's a dangerous tool."

Rubio told CNN: "These are extraordinary measures and deeply damage the country. So, that's why we have term limits, that's why we have vice presidents and that's why we have elections. But they're an extraordinary measure, they should not be routine."

The Republican Party has become so radicalized that the politicians in the Party are maniacally demanding Biden be impeached without reasonable cause as both retribution for Trump having been impeached twice and to distract focus from the legal jeopardy that Trump is in for his many serious misdeeds in office. The impeachment investigation of Joe Biden is stupid not only in light of the lack of reasonable grounds, but also due to the negative outcomes likely for such action, as was seen in the wake of Republican efforts to impeach Bill Clinton on flimsy pretenses.

After the insurrection on January 6, Kevin McCarthy notably laid blame directly on Donald Trump, saying that Trump bore responsibility for the attack on Congress by the rioting mob, and that Trump should have immediately denounced the mob when he saw what was unfolding.

"Make no mistake," he said one week after the Jan. 6 coup attempt, "those who are responsible for (the January 6) chaos will be brought to justice."

But remember what happened soon thereafter. On Jan. 28th, the cowardly supplicant to the posturing leader of the Trumpian cult ignominiously made a trip to Mar-a-Lago to kowtow at Trump's imperious and impetuously stomping feet. McCarthy obsequiously tried to make amends for the true patriotism he had hinted at when he indicated that those who were responsible for the Jan. 6 riot would be brought to justice. This is how he betrayed the American people and threw his lot back in with the all-but-comically despotic demagogue, prolific liar, rule of law-violating criminal and dictator wannabe.

Recognizing that their political prospects were aligned, McCarthy got back "on the Trump train."

McCarthy and his successor as Speaker, and MAGA Republicans, are traitors against the common good, and against personal freedoms and the general welfare. This can be seen in their selfishly self-interested actions. They are also hypocrites and frauds who are milking the system for power and profit at the expense of the people.

MAGA Republicans have become main enablers of the fringe wing of the House in national politics that is giving powerful and entirely unwarranted influence to authoritarianism and neo-fascist tendencies in American politics.

Surely it is not Constitutional to deprive large groups of people of fair representation, and to entrench white nationalism and a continued hegemony of male patriarchal control over the populace (and particularly oppressively over women).

The Lasting Consequences of Election Subversion

Republicans reveal a deep disregard for law and order in their truly desperate attempts to protect Trump from being held accountable for the 91 felony counts he is charged with, in 4 separate serious cases.

Lawrence Tribe and Judge Luttig make persuasive arguments that Trump is disqualified from ever again holding office, due to the provisions of Section 3 of the 14th Amendment to the Constitution.

Georgia prosecutors and a grand jury indicted former President Trump and 18 of his allies for attempting to overturn the 2020 election. The broad conspiracy detailed by investigators included spreading lies, spurring attacks on election officials, breaching voting systems, and inciting an insurrection. But the dangers didn't end on January 6. Trump's assault on our democracy birthed an election denial movement that continues to threaten voting rights and future elections.

The indictments underscore the need to safeguard our election system and the individuals who run it.

Jennifer Rubin expressed the opinion on August 17, in *Fani Willis puts violence front and center*, that the indictment in Georgia works to refocus our attention on the mob Trump and Giuliani allegedly tried to incite, and on the threats the MAGA horde lobbed toward election officials and others, and on the gripping testimony from Ruby Freeman and her daughter, Wandrea "Shaye" Moss, at the House Jan. 6 hearings. From everything we've seen, these Georgians' lives were made a living hell.

Freeman and Moss sued Giuliani for spreading lies about them and for defamation, and won a \$148 million judgment against him on Dec. 15, 2023.

"Without the Georgia case and without Trump identified as the head of the alleged criminal enterprise, there would be no justice for those victims, no accounting for the use of mob violence to corrupt the democratic process."

Ruth Ben-Ghiat, author of *Strongmen: Mussolini to the Present* and an expert on fascism, told Insider that Trump resorted to inciting the crowd to violence when his other schemes failed "because he truly believes that violence is a way you can change history." She added, "The thing about autocrats today is that they're all corrupt, but they're also violent. They use all of these tools at the same time. So, we can't isolate one and say that Jan. 6 was just about this or just about that. It was everything. It was a process of months and it culminated in violence."

"The element of thuggishness reflective of authoritarians throughout time and around the globe should not be whitewashed in Trump's prosecution. It's easy to make Trump's alleged attempted coup, run mostly by lawyers and focused on memos distorting and misrepresenting constitutional principles, seem sophisticated, legalistic and without human victims. But, at bottom, the alleged plot rested on the threat of violence both in D.C. and in Georgia."

And let's not forget this is all part of Trump's playbook. As Ben-Ghiat recalled in a recent interview, "Since 2015, he has used his rallies ... as radicalization sites. And over and over, he told his supporters at these rallies that violence was a good way to solve conflict." She reminded us, "How many times did he say, 'Oh, you know, in the good old days, we used to be able to punch people, and nothing happened'? So, that discourse of violence, which encouraged Jan. 6, is part of this."

In December 2020, Georgia election official Gabriel Sterling held an emotional news conference, at which he said: "Mr. President, it looks like you likely lost the state of Georgia. We're investigating. What you don't have the ability to do -- and you need to step up and say this -- is stop inspiring people to commit potential acts of violence." He added, "Someone's going to get hurt. Someone's going to get shot. Someone's going to get killed. And it's not right." Unfortunately, the purported criminal enterprise did not stop, either in Georgia or in D.C.

Trump and his cohorts must be held accountable for infusing our politics with violence and the threat of violence, and for the harms done to election workers like Ruby Freeman, and for the police officers wounded on Capitol Hill, and for the trauma inflicted by the mob they stand accused of orchestrating. Stay tuned to a courtroom in Fulton County, Georgia. Lights, CAMERAS, action!

Finding Trump guilty would be a valuable service to our democracy by preventing Trump from triumphing in his bid for success at being a bullying fascist strongman. Note that it may well occur to some observers that supporters of authority-abuser wannabes are themselves gullibly guilty of disdaining democracy in favor of male-dominated, rich people pandering, inequality-stoking and white supremacist policies and priorities.

Threats Posed by Republicans

Former federal Judge J. Michael Luttig, a conservative, wrote in early August 2023, *If Trump wins in 2024, "we would have little hope of saving American democracy."*

Judge Luttig, whose advice helped to thwart Donald Trump's coup attempt, finds something clever in how Special Counsel Jack Smith crafted the indictment and the charges he decided to file. "Jack Smith anticipated that the former president's primary defense would be under the First Amendment," he told Ali Velshi. As a result, "the former president does not have a First Amendment defense to any of these charges that have now been brought against him by the grand jury." Still, Luttig warns that Trump remains a danger to our system of government. "Were the former president to win this election, we would have little hope of saving American democracy in the near future."

Creeping Fascism

Merriam-Webster defines fascism as "a political philosophy, movement, or regime ... that exalts nation and often race above the individual and that stands for a centralized autocratic government headed by a dictatorial leader, severe economic and social regimentation, and forcible suppression of opposition." And that sure seems like what the MAGA movement and its priorities and spin are about these days.

Kevin McCarthy is emblematic of Republican politicians that have abandoned ethical principles to gain power by catering to the far right. It should be remembered that, after Republicans had gained a very narrow majority in the U.S. House of Representatives in the 2022 midterm elections, McCarthy was forced to make big concessions to extreme right members of the "Freedom Caucus" to become Speaker of the House after a humiliating 15 rounds of voting in January 2023. McCarthy thus obsequiously gave extremists in his Party excessive power and influence.

These unethical partisan extremists include Jim Jordan, Matt Gaetz and Marjorie Taylor Greene, who are trying to weaponize the federal government to weaken Democrats and protect Donald Trump from being held accountable for numerous misdeeds and violations of federal and state laws and the Constitution. McCarthy was ignominiously thrown out of his Speaker role on October 3 -- the first time in U.S. history that a Speaker has been axed -- due to hard-right Republicans being dissatisfied that he helped prevent a government shutdown.

During this particularly dangerous moment in time, the clock is ticking. More than three weeks lapsed without a Speaker of the House during October 2023, paralyzing Congress, and another harmful government shutdown loomed in mid-November. Finally, a new Speaker of the House was elected, and he is a religious extremist who was forced to make a short-term compromise to continue federal government funding for a few months. In addition, Alabama Republican Sen. Tuberville continues to endanger national security with his anti-abortion fanaticism by preventing hundreds of people from moving up and filling important positions in the military.

One of the most brazenly unethical Republicans and most egregious examples of Republicans abandoning ethical principles is George Santos, the disgraced former representative from New York. He was elected to the House in

November 2022 after he had lied blatantly to voters about his ancestry, education, financial status, work history, property ownership, ethnicity, religion, charity work and other matters. A federal grand jury has indicted Santos on 23-counts of criminal charges related to allegations of fraud, campaign-finance crimes and his many improprieties, and accused him of charging donors' credit cards tens of thousands of dollars without permission and using campaign funds to cover his personal expenses when he was running for a seat in the House. Santos "sought to fraudulently exploit every aspect of his House candidacy for his own personal financial profit."

Yet top Republican leaders in the House voted not to expel him despite a scathing Ethics Committee report highlighting his misdeeds. They did this for nakedly partisan political purposes, putting Party and personal gain over Country and the common good.

Nonetheless, Santos was ousted from the House by a 311 to 114 vote on Dec. 1, overriding all the top Republican's votes to allow him to remain in his ill-gotten job. "The ousting ends a surreal term for Santos, who captured national and international attention with a complicated web of lies, deception and alleged crimes that saw him fall from his party's good graces after less than a year in office." Some of those lies included claiming his grandparents escaped the Holocaust and that his mother was in the World Trade Center on Sept. 11.

Former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, who died at the age of 93 on Dec. 1, 2023, once sent an open letter to "friends and fellow Americans", at a time that she was 88 years old, to announce that she had the beginnings of dementia. In the letter she urged Americans to put "country and the common good above party and self-interest."

The top Republican leadership in the House egregiously violated that good advice when they voted not to expel the deceitful fraudster George Santos from his position in Congress after the investigative subcommittee of the House Committee on Ethics released a 56-page report on Nov. 16 that found Santos "placed his desire for private gain above his duty to uphold the Constitution, federal law, and ethical principles."

The times are consequentially dangerous, in addition, due to a murderous war waged by Vladimir Putin and Russia against Ukraine, and the harsh war Israel began waging against Hamas after the Sunni Islamist political and military organization brutally killed more than 1,200 people in Israel in a terrorist attack on October 7. Prospects for peace in the Middle East have diminished drastically, and this may have been a main goal of the extremist organization and its attack on Israel. According to one article by Anne Applebaum, *Netanyahu's Attack on Democracy Left Israel Unprepared*, and "the prime minister brought about a situation in which all the options are bad."

The current surge in right-wing extremism in the U.S. is accompanied by increases in the number of neo-Nazi groups, and anti-Semitic incidents are spiking. This poses big threats to our democracy.

Another glaring example of Republican dirty tricks took place in North Carolina earlier this year. It turns out that the North Carolina Democrat who dramatically switched parties in April 2023 was a GOP plant all along. Tricia Cotham was recruited to run as a Democrat in a safe-blue district on a pro-choice platform, and then after she got elected, she switched sides to give North Carolina Republicans the supermajority they needed to pass a restrictive abortion bill.

Republicans seem to have completely abandoned honesty, honor and integrity in their maniacal pursuit of domineering power!

What Is Really Going On?

Historian Heather Cox Richardson wrote on July 31, 2023:

"As David Smith noted today in *The Guardian*, quoting Democratic strategist Simon Rosenberg, Republican talking points against Biden and the Democrats 'are having a really bad summer.' Republicans have centered their attacks on what they insist is a crisis at the southern border, crime in cities, and inflation. But in fact, as Smith points out, there is relative calm at the border (unlawful crossings dropped by more than 70% when Biden's policies went into effect in early May) and violent crime has fallen (while Republicans are in the awkward position of explaining away Trump's own apparent lawbreaking and threats of violence)."

"And inflation is down to 3%, lower than in any other major economy, while employment is at its strongest rate in half a century. On Friday, Yale School of Management professor Jeffrey Sonnenfeld and Steven Tian, a former quantitative investment analyst, wrote an article in *Fortune* titled: *Bidenomics' Critics Are Being Proven Wrong. Happy Days Are Here Again.*"

"Sonnenfeld and Tian wrote that the economic theories of the past were proved wrong long ago and 'the U.S. economy is now pulling off what all these experts said was impossible: strong growth and record employment amidst plummeting inflation. And just as importantly, thanks to Bidenomics, the fruits of economic prosperity are inclusive and broad-based, amidst a renaissance in American manufacturing, investment, and productivity.' They conclude: 'Bidenomics is proving to be the most impactful and transformative public investment program since FDR's New Deal, with even Morgan Stanley acknowledging that economists broadly underestimated the positive effects of Bidenomics.'"

Speaking of Distractions

Look what's happening here. Trump and his allies are hyper politicizing the legal jeopardy Trump is in, and falsely claiming that efforts to hold him accountable for his many serious misdeeds are merely a witch-hunt persecution of an innocent man. That is a blatant lie, as judged by the damning evidence in each of the cases. And they are trying to delay proceedings "to run out the clock", desperately hoping that Trump can somehow win in November 2024 and intervene in the pursuit of justice to get off the hook, once again.

There is an enveloping distracting maelstrom in the news today, "oh boy", and I almost had to laugh, there are so many scandals and so much sensationalism, Trumpian spin, deceitful contentions, outrageous mischaracterizations, and whataboutism -- and such accelerating catastrophes (almost 100 persons burned to death in wildfires on Maui? -- "What fresh hell is this?"). All of this is taking place in a modern new wild west of echo chamber propaganda broadcast by far-right news and opinion outlets, and on social media platforms that spread lies and take advantage of people's fears, grievances, prejudices, resentments and anger.

Let's not allow the sensationalism of all the Trump scandals to distract our attention from the great contrast between Democratic governing proposals and Republican ones.

Trump basically promises that he would rule, if elected next November, in a dictatorial manner, rewarding loyalists and smiting his "enemies", and purging the government of anyone who opposes him -- or tries to hold him accountable -- or acts in democratically fair, responsible, ethical and freedom-protecting ways.

Trump was indicted, among other things, for spreading lies about election fraud that he knew were false, in order to sow distrust in the democratic process in his increasingly desperate attempts to claw his way back into to power.

Revealingly, Trump told his Chief of Staff Mark Meadows on December 12th, 2020, "I don't want people to know that we lost, Mark. This is embarrassing. Figure it out. We need to figure it out. I don't want people to know that we lost."

It should be clearly understood how many people close to Trump told him the truth about the 2020 election. His campaign manager told him he lost. His Attorney General Bill Barr and most of his lawyers told him he lost. His campaign data experts told him he lost. The courts told him he lost. His Justice Department told him he lost.

And the outside private research firms commissioned by his campaign to prove his electoral fraud claims, "disputed many of his theories" and could not offer any proof to back up his false claims, basically confirming that he lost.

"The work and research -- completed by roughly a dozen people at a respected research company -- was carried out in the final weeks of 2020 and the results were presented to the Trump campaign before the end of that year. That's right -- Trump and his campaign could have prevented the January 6th insurrection by releasing the results of the investigation when they got them, but instead chose to go forward with their conspiracy theories, ultimately driving a large crowd to the Capitol Building. We know the rest."

"Trump and opponents of voting rights across the county continue to falsely assert that the 2020 election was stolen despite abundant evidence to the contrary. They keep pushing these lies to protect their own power, suppress votes, drive down faith in our democracy, and file frivolous lawsuits -- all because they think it'll help

them win the next election. We're fighting every day to counter these lies, defend our right to vote, and create a more inclusive democracy."

Right-Wing News

Jeet Heer wrote in *The Breitbartization of Fox News* on March 22, 2018 that America's most popular cable news network has done more to create Trumpism than perhaps any other influence, surpassing the extreme right-wing Breitbart News and becoming the real "platform of the alt-right".

"No media outlet did more to create Trumpism than Breitbart News, which now finds its audience collapsing. Under the direction of Steve Bannon, who took over after founder Andrew Breitbart's death in 2012, the website grew its reach and influence by promoting a politics of racial resentment, immigration restriction, protectionism, and anti-internationalism. In doing so, it was instrumental in the rise of ethno-nationalism on the right."

"Fox News not only has cultivated a symbiotic relationship with the president, but has adopted the racial paranoia and conspiracy-theorizing of the alt-right."

"Fox News has been a partisan Republican outlet since its creation in 1996, but the tenor of its politics has changed as the GOP has evolved. During the presidency of George W. Bush and the early Obama years, Fox News often featured mainstream conservatives, like *National Review's* Jonah Goldberg, who supported free trade and touted the benefits of legal immigration. But with the rise of Trump, the network has been giving less time to figures like Goldberg, and more to Trump friendly-voices like English nationalist Nigel Farage" (Leader of the Brexit Party from 2019-2021).

"In other words, Fox News used to be simply right-wing. Now it's becoming a far-right outlet that resembles Breitbart at its peak under Bannon. The paranoia about the 'deep state,' once confined to the political fringe, has become standard fare for hosts like Sean Hannity. On March 14, the day before Attorney General Jeff Sessions fired former FBI Deputy Director Andrew McCabe, Hannity told viewers, 'McCabe is corrupt, and he's as crooked as they come. He's one of the deep state actors that we've been telling you about and he needs to be held accountable, and firing McCabe, by the way, should only be a start.'" McCabe was actually an honorable public servant.

"Meanwhile, Fox News host Tucker Carlson is helping to mainstream alt-right racial paranoia. On Tuesday night, he warned about the impact of demographic changes on American society. Carlson allowed that 'most immigrants are nice' but warned that 'this is more change than human beings are designed to digest,' asking, 'How would you feel if that happened in your neighborhood?'"

"As Mic's Jack Smith IV noted, Carlson was echoing a common refrain of the racist right, that demographic change is a plot by elites to destroy white America."

"This segment was only the recent of many Carlson episodes that have popularized alt-right ideas. In an interview with CNBC, former Fox News contributor William Kristol said Carlson's show is 'close now to racism', and a 'combination of dumbing down ... and stirring people's emotions in a very unhealthy way.'"

"This shift at Fox News is even too much for extremists like (military intelligence analyst) Ralph Peters, apparently." Peters was a Fox News contributor who had once referred on air to President Barack Obama as the "reincarnation of Pontius Pilate" and a "total pussy," but he quit Fox in March 2018 in shame, writing in a letter to his colleagues: "Today, I feel that Fox News is assaulting our constitutional order and the rule of law, while fostering corrosive and unjustified paranoia among viewers. When prime-time hosts -- who have never served our country in any capacity -- dismiss facts and empirical reality to launch profoundly dishonest assaults on the FBI, the Justice Department, the courts, the intelligence community ... I cannot be part of the same organization, even at a remove."

The Breitbartization of Fox is all the more troubling because television is a singularly powerful medium for reaching Republican voters. Debunking the recent tendency to blame Facebook and other new media for political radicalism, *New York Times* columnist Ross Douthat argues that television played a much bigger role in creating Trump than the internet did. It was television that convinced millions of Americans that Trump was a business

genius despite his record of bankruptcy, and which gifted him countless hours of free advertising through unchecked coverage of his campaign rallies and Twitter feed.

"It's also clear -- as the economists Levi Boxell, Matthew Gentzkow and Jesse Shapiro wrote in these pages late last year -- that among older white Americans, the core demographic where first the primaries and then the general election were decided, television still far outstrips the internet as the most important source of news," Douthat wrote. "And indeed, the three economists noted, for all the talk about Breitbart's influence and Russian meddling and dark web advertising, Trump only improved on Mitt Romney's showing among Americans who don't use the internet, and he 'actually lost support among internet-using voters.'"

"Breitbart gave Trump his ideology; television gave him his popularity. But what happens now that the most popular cable news network in the U.S. is pumping Breitbartian bile into millions of homes -- including the president's -- every morning and night? How will this influence the Republican Party, and how will it influence Trump? There will be consequences not just for one side of America's political divide, but everyone -- citizens and (especially) noncitizens alike. And whatever the impact may be, it seems certain to dwarf whatever a few dozen Russians with Facebook accounts could accomplish."

Making Threats

From the article, *With threatening message, Trump creates new problem for himself*: "At Donald Trump's latest arraignment, a judge warned him not to 'obstruct the administration of justice.' He published a threatening missive a day later." ... "Roughly 24 hours after Trump exited the courthouse, he turned to his social media platform to deliver a new, nine-word message: "IF YOU GO AFTER ME, I'M COMING AFTER YOU!"

"When Donald Trump was arraigned in a Washington, D.C., courthouse (recently), the proceedings were not altogether normal. Most criminal defendants, for example, don't receive Secret Service protection and it's generally not necessary to close down streets around the building ahead of the proceedings."

"But what transpired inside the courtroom was unusual, too. After Judge Moxila Upadhyaya reviewed the conditions of release with the former president, she added some warnings that defendants don't typically hear." She said, "Finally, sir, I want to remind you that it is a crime to try to influence a juror, or to threaten or attempt to bribe a witness or any other person who may have information about your case, or to retaliate against anyone for providing information about your case to the prosecution, or to otherwise obstruct the administration of justice."

"Andrew Weissmann, a longtime Justice Department veteran and an MSNBC legal analyst, added soon after, 'I was a prosecutor for 21 years, and I was a defense lawyer for five years, and I've never heard that.'" ... "Nevertheless, Upadhyaya was apparently familiar enough with the defendant's antics to make the warning. Whether the Republican *fully understood* the admonition is another matter entirely."

Fundraising for Power and Profit

The article "A Trump fundraising email exposes his main goal. It's depressingly simple" explains, "The 2024 election, Donald Trump says in one of the myriad fundraising pitches that he has sent to his followers since his third criminal indictment in four months, (before the fourth indictment in Georgia), will be 'the FINAL BATTLE for the hearts and soul of our country.' Giving one's hard-earned money to a multimillionaire who needs to pay his legal fees for repeatedly and brazenly breaking the law will 'determine whether we can keep our Republic or whether America has succumbed to the dark forces of tyranny.'"

"Oddly, Trump has a point (though, to be sure, succumbing to the 'dark forces of tyranny' would mean his return to the White House, not the re-election of his political rival, Joe Biden). The central issue of the 2024 campaign will almost certainly be Trump's legal status -- and whether the former president will ever be held criminally accountable for his actions. If it feels like American politics hasn't been able to escape the last presidential election, we ain't seen nothing yet."

"While Trump may have plenty of reasons for wanting to return to the White House (with public service and/or helping the American people at the bottom of the list), none is likely to loom larger than the fact that likely the single best way for him to avoid going to prison is to win the nation's highest elected office."

"His advisers, in private conversations, have been pretty blunt," New York Times political reporter Maggie Haberman told CNN ... "They see it as he has to win the election and that is how he guarantees that he does not face jail time."

"The fact that they are looking to an election to the highest office in the land as some kind of insurance policy -- or an out for him -- really affects or colors the entire presidential race," she noted. And "That is putting it mildly."

"Since Trump claims what he did in 2020 was justified in trying to overturn what he claims was an illegitimate election, and considers the indictments against him to amount to election interference by the Biden administration, one can hardly expect him to deny that a victory in November 2024 would be akin to a get-out-of-jail-free card."

"If anything, it would be surprising if Trump doesn't state it openly, and uses it as a selling point for his supporters to get to the polls. 'A vote for Trump keeps him out of prison' is as crass a presidential campaign slogan as one can imagine, but for a guy who ran against Hillary Clinton on a message of 'lock her up', it's hardly a reach."

"In fact, what has been most striking about Trump's response to his two federal indictments is that he has leaned into attacking the lead prosecutor, special counsel Jack Smith. Calling Smith 'deranged' might resonate with Trump's besotted followers, but it's hardly the kind of approach that most defense lawyers would rally behind."

"But it's fairly clear that Trump isn't all that focused on winning in the courtroom -- where the evidence and the law are stacked against him -- but rather at the ballot box next year, where he has a puncher's chance to prevail. Attacking Smith and dismissing the charges against him as a political attack is above all a strategy for avoiding prison by winning the 2024 presidential election and not having to face that possibility."

"If somehow Trump can push the trials past 2024 Election Day, we may never find out how persuasive the evidence against him is to a jury of his peers. A Trump presidential victory, however, would likely mean that the federal charges against him would disappear."

"But what if the trials are fast-tracked and begin early next year? Considering the overwhelming evidence of Trump's criminal misdeeds, there's a more than a reasonable chance that he will be convicted. In that scenario, the 2024 election will be completely colored by Trump's legal status. It's likely that the No. 1 issue in the campaign will be a self-pardon for Trump or some other gambit to ensure that he avoids criminal accountability. If there is a convicted criminal appearing on a presidential ticket, what else will there be to talk about in 2024?"

"From Trump's perspective, this 'strategy' makes a lot of sense, since a) he clearly doesn't care about America's democratic system, and b) federal prison is generally not considered the best way to spend one's twilight years."

"But what about the party that has sworn loyalty to him? Rather than making 2024 a referendum on Joe Biden's presidency or perhaps his advanced age, every Republican candidate for House, Senate and governor will have to explain their support for a candidate who is running for president to, in effect, upend the rule of law. That might work out for candidates in deep red states and congressional districts, but for those in more competitive races, it is likely to serve as a political albatross from which there is no escape."

"While it's possible that voters will rally around the former president and come to view the multiple prosecutions against him as a political witch hunt -- that will more likely be a minority position among Americans. The more that 2024 is about Trump, the worse it will be for him and the party he leads. Trump might be right that the 'final battle' is coming -- and it will be no walk in the park for the American people to have to endure another campaign full of his lies. But for Republicans, it will likely be downright terrifying."

Soon after Trump was indicted by special counsel Jack Smith over his election fraud lies and January 6 crimes, the respected journalist Dan Rather wrote: "A thunderclap hits the headlines."

"How long does it take for the full impact to sink in? Can we even comprehend all that it implies?"

"While we knew another indictment for Donald Trump was likely, it is impossible to be fully prepared. There will be much to parse and analyze in the days to come."

"But one central fact we already knew. Because we saw it happen. In real time."

"Our nation was wronged by a man who had sworn to uphold our Constitution. It was a betrayal of our noblest democratic ideals. In the months and years that have followed, we have learned further details of the treachery. This indictment suggests there might be much more to discover."

"The latest charges add to a litany of grave malfeasance already alleged in previous charges. Prosecutors have shown some of their hand. The evidence seems strong, even as we recognize the defendant carries a legal presumption of innocence. (Individuals and large swaths of the population can come to their own personal conclusions, of course. But by law, every defendant is presumed innocent until proven otherwise.)"

"Almost immediately comes a cacophony of resonant emotions. They are uncontainable. We have much to consider: The facts. The danger. The shame. The anger."

"There is no yardstick in our national story by which to measure this moment -- a former and potentially future president stands accused of abusing his office and undermining the safety and security of our republic. We have written some form of this sentence countless times before. But the cumulative repetition does not lessen its impact as we consider the depths to which Trump allegedly sank."

"Yet to focus only on the man is to miss the full contours of this perilous story. Today's indictment is a legal document. But it is also part of a more sweeping historic and political indictment of our times, for Trump couldn't have done this alone. Today represents an indictment of all who validated his vile indulgences, whitewashed his wantonness, disguised his depravity, legitimized his lawlessness, and acquiesced to his autocracy."

"Meanwhile, Trump is not the only one facing trial. We all are. What kind of country will we have? How much are we willing to fight for our ideals? Our future?"

"Today marks a reckoning, but it's far from a resolution. The danger Trump and his legions of MAGA supporters pose remains very present, very real, and very dire. The polls indicate this con man, divisive charlatan, and wrecking ball to the rule of law is running away with the Republican nomination for the presidency. And he looks, at this point, despite everything, to be competitive with President Biden. He could be reelected."

"The more scrutiny he receives, the more evidence of his unfitness for office is laid out publicly, the more his stalwarts rally behind him. Trump has no coherent or persuasive rejoinders to the numerous charges he faces. He instinctively relies on his overused playbook of lies, divisiveness, and dystopian rhetoric. It's all he's got. Nevertheless, his crowds roar their delight without hesitation."

"A campaign rally, however, is not a court of law. And Special Counsel Jack Smith seems to have a meticulousness that matches Trump's recklessness. The former president's antics may drive the Republican faithful to euphoria. Will that work in court or at the ballot box next November?"

"Some of us will be pondering that question deep into the night and beyond."

Georgia on My Mind

Rafi Schwartz wrote on August 15, 2023, in his article *The Fulton County charges aren't just Trump's latest legal threat -- they might be his biggest challenge to date*:

"After more than a year of investigation, and months of telegraphing what, in retrospect, seems like an inevitable outcome, a grand jury in Fulton County, Georgia ... handed up a massive criminal indictment against former President Donald Trump and more than a dozen co-conspirators, alleging they engaged in a 'criminal enterprise' to subvert the results of the 2020 presidential election in Trump's favor. Over the course of the 98-page document, Trump and his co-conspirators are accused of racketeering, conspiracy to commit forgery, perjury, illegally breaching voting equipment and other charges, with the former president himself facing 13 felony counts related to his push to 'unlawfully change the outcome of the election' -- which he'd lost."

"The Georgia indictment completes what had widely been expected to be a quadrangle of criminal charges against the former president, alongside charges stemming from his alleged hush money payments to adult film star Stormy Daniels during the 2016 election, the mishandling of classified documents at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida,

and broader election subversion in the wake of his 2020 loss. But the Georgia charges -- bringing Trump's grand total to 91 -- stand apart from their predecessors in terms of both scale and specificity, marking a 'key departure from special counsel Jack Smith's charges against Trump for election subversion,' according to CNN. So what makes this latest indictment so different from Trump's previous charges, and where could this all lead as we draw closer to the upcoming presidential election?"

"What are the commentators saying?"

The Associated Press said that the Fulton County indictment "may be the last of the Trump indictments, but it was the big one." Thanks to Georgia's unique anti-racketeering statutes, District Attorney Fani Willis was able to craft "a wide-ranging narrative by citing and charging other players in the alleged wrongdoing, even those out of state," as compared to Justice Department Special Counsel Jack Smith's more narrowly focused indictment. Willis' indictment is "far more encompassing and detailed than Smith's ongoing federal investigation" agreed the Washington Post, while noting that Willis has "declined to say if she has had contact with Smith" in the lead-up to the charges.

Unlike a "conspiracy" charge, the RICO statutes behind this latest indictment mean Willis is "painting this picture of people winking and nodding and working toward this end goal of overthrowing the election, but without some kind of expressed agreement," Georgia State University law professor Anthony Michael Kreis explained in *The Conversation*. Moreover, the expansive nature of RICO charges creates a "big incentive for people who are listed as co-defendants to cooperate with the state and to provide evidence, in order to escape punishment and secure favorable deals," Kreis continued, concluding that "this is probably the biggest risk to Trump, and the likelihood that he would be convicted in Fulton County rests with this."

Conversely, the sprawling nature of the RICO charges could make things more difficult when it comes time to bring the case to trial. "'Less is more' is the gold standard that Jack Smith used in the recent Jan. 6 indictment of just one defendant, Donald Trump," former federal prosecutor Gene Rossi told Bloomberg. The more defendants there are, as in the case of Fulton County, "they all have their own schedules and their calendars. It's like herding cats."

Crucially, while Trump is expected to "employ a similar defense in both the earlier federal indictment and the Fulton County case" -- that of simply having exercised his first amendment right to speak out against what he viewed as election fraud -- "it's not clear that defense will work" in this case, AP said. No matter how benign some of the 161 acts alleged by prosecutors to have made up the overall conspiracy to overturn the election results may seem when taken alone, "the indictment argues they were all steps in what it calls 'a conspiracy to unlawfully change the outcome of the election in favor of Trump,'" AP continued. In other words, the alleged crime is less about the sprawling web of individual actions, as it is about their cumulative effect and the motivation behind them.

What's next? Speaking right after the charges were announced, Willis gave Trump and his 18 co-conspirators until Aug. 25 to "voluntarily" turn themselves in, and said that she would recommend their trial be set sometime in the coming six months. Accordingly, "there stands to be some crossover in evidence -- especially in the form of witness testimony -- that may pose challenges" for Willis and Smith's "dueling" trial timelines, CNN said, noting that "once one of the cases goes to trial, any witness that testifies in that case will be locked in for their testimony in the other -- or otherwise facing the risk of perjury." Moreover, if Trump is actually convicted in Georgia, he will nevertheless be unable to issue himself a pardon -- or ask for one from anyone else -- should he be elected president regardless. Not only are federal pardons inapplicable on state charges, but unlike other states, Georgia doesn't allow the governor to directly pardon convicted people. While there is a complicated state pardon process, it involves an appointed board of members and can only be applied years after from the initial conviction and sentencing.

Ultimately, this latest indictment comes amidst the quickening pace of the Republican presidential primary race, and the 2024 presidential election at large. In that context, "a fourth Trump indictment is unlikely to be any more ruinous to his political career than the previous three -- at least, in the Republican primary," CNN asserted. It noted that none of the former president's rivals have been able to "take advantage of Trump's political liabilities without alienating vast numbers of his supporters." Crucially, however, the likelihood that Trump's trial in Georgia

may be televised, at least in part, means that "there is a difference between indictments and actually sitting there in a courtroom in a trial and how that impacts voters," Marc Short, former chief of staff to Trump's Vice President Mike Pence, told CNN's Jake Tapper this week.

Michael Moore's Perspective

"Friends," wrote Michael Moore on August 15, "Just moments ago, as the clock was ready to strike midnight, Fani Willis, the District Attorney of Fulton, Co., Georgia, announced that a citizens Grand Jury has voted to indict former president Donald J. Trump and his 18 Co-Conspirators (including Rudy Giuliani, Chief of Staff Mark Meadows, lawyer John Eastman and others) on 41 counts of racketeering and other criminal acts for conspiring to form an 'organized crime enterprise' which attempted to 'illegally overturn the 2020 presidential election' through theft, fraud, forgery, impersonating law enforcement, impersonating electors to the Electoral College, and for conspiring with other top elected Republican officials in six other states, plus Republican leaders in the District of Columbia, to overthrow the election and re-seat Trump in the Oval Office for a 2nd term -- even though Trump lost the election by 7 million votes. The prosecutor is charging Trump and his crime group under the RICO statutes that are used to convict and imprison those involved in mob-like crimes."

"The 90-page indictment lists the commission of '161 overt criminal acts' -- a breathtaking, comprehensive list of crimes in an enterprise led by Trump. The DA spent nearly two years on her extensive investigation. It reads like no stone was left unturned, with a massive amount of evidence obtained by the prosecutors in her office. It also states that there are 30 other 'unnamed, unindicted co-conspirators' who may be indicted at a later time. So at least 48 people joined Trump in forming his organized crime family to overthrow our Democracy. Unbelievable. How close did we come to losing this country?"

"This Emergency Podcast System edition of *"Rumble with Michael Moore"* offers an urgent, immediate analysis of this historic moment -- and how *We, the People*, need to stay thoroughly informed and be as active as we ever have been as citizens of this country. This is not the time to have 'Trump Fatigue.' This is the moment to put this traitor on trial and make sure that this criminal who has gotten away with EVERYTHING for over 50 YEARS, finally faces Justice."

In *The Week* on August 17, Harold Maass wrote an article titled *The debate over which side is criminalizing politics: "Which side is really criminalizing politics here?"* In it, he said, "Trump maliciously tries to twist the facts of his indictment in Georgia by asserting, 'The fake charges put forth in their sham indictment are an outrageous criminalization of political speech. They are trying to make it illegal to question the results of a bad election.'"

"But Trump did much more than question results. If he had stopped there or at lawful strategies such as filing lawsuits or requesting audits, he wouldn't be in this situation. The Aug. 1 indictment introduction says, 'The defendant had a right, like every American, to speak publicly about the election and even to claim, falsely, that there had been outcome-determinative fraud during the election and that he won.'"

"To be clear, the four felony charges against Trump are about actions meant to overturn results."

The indictment says Trump "pursued unlawful means of discounting legitimate votes and subverting the election results," which basically amounted to criminal conspiracies. In paragraph after paragraph, the indictment details actions Trump took to achieve the goal of the conspiracy.

"This is all conduct, not speech," said E. Danya Perry, a white-collar criminal defense attorney and former federal prosecutor in New York.

"Unsurprisingly, Republicans are reacting to these charges with maximum dishonesty," said Amanda Marcotte at Salon. Sen. Tim Scott (R-S.C.), who is 'alleged' battling Trump for the GOP nomination, accused prosecutors of weaponizing the legal system for political purposes. 'That statement requires pointedly ignoring the fact that most of the people who have testified against Trump are Republicans.' It's 'so aggravating to hear Republicans disingenuously accuse Democrats of 'criminalizing politics,' because Trump is the one who did that, by turning the GOP into a mafia and making 'it clear that being a loyal Republican means being ready and willing to commit crimes for the boss, or at least to dishonor yourself by pretending you were looking the other way and didn't see anything.'"

"Trump has criminalized both social problems and politics itself," said Henry Giroux in *The Conversation*. He and his allies have "created a culture of lies, illusions, cruelty, and misrepresentation," and used it to attack "reason, critical thinking, informed judgment, and social responsibility." Trump is the "embodiment" of a crisis that started with the "right-wing counter-revolution" that emerged with Ronald Reagan's reign in the 1980s. Since then, "the democratic values that informed the social contract and common good have been increasingly displaced by market values that stress self-interest" and the "celebration of greed." Trump is a "national disgrace" but he's still virtually assured of getting nominated and has even odds of beating Biden to win the White House again. The next election will be "a choice between democracy and the further criminalization of American politics."

Defending Democracy

Historian Heather Cox Richardson wrote in her 7/29/23 edition of *Letters from an American* about the overriding importance of democratic institutions for us to live in peace, security and prosperity. She concluded that there is great value in "a vision of American leadership, based not in economic expansion, military might, or personalities, or even in policies, but in the strength of the institutions of democracy, preserved through global alliances."

Historical perspective is immensely valuable, especially because of the recognition that deceitful propaganda poses grave threats by twisting facts and distorting reality to promote a socially undesirable political agenda and gain advantages at the expense of the common good.

Take Joe Biden, for instance, who is the target of venomous attacks by Republicans hoping to grab back the power of the presidency in 2024. Here is the perceptive Heather Cox Richardson's perspective:

"President Joe Biden gave a surprisingly interesting talk in Freeport, Maine, yesterday (July 28, 2023). When he first spoke at the State Department on February 4, 2021, Biden tied foreign policy and domestic policy together, saying: 'There's no longer a bright line between foreign and domestic policy. Every action we take in our conduct abroad, we must take with American working families in mind. Advancing a foreign policy for the middle class demands urgent focus on our domestic economic renewal.'"

"If we invest in ourselves and our people," he said back in 2021, "if we fight to ensure that American businesses are positioned to compete and win on the global stage, if the rules of international trade aren't stacked against us, if our workers and intellectual property are protected, then there's no country on Earth ... that can match us."

"Investing in our diplomacy isn't something we do just because it's the right thing to do for the world. We do it in order to live in peace, security and prosperity. We do it because it's in our own naked self-interest. When we strengthen our alliances, we amplify our power as well as our ability to disrupt threats before they can reach our shores."

"Yesterday, in a campaign reception at a private home in Freeport, he gave what amounted to a more personal version of that speech, updated after the events of his first two and a half years in office. As he spoke informally to a small audience, he seemed to hit what he sees as the major themes of his presidency so far. The talk included an interesting twist."

"Biden talked again about the world being at an inflection point, defining it as an abrupt turn off an established path that means you can never get back on the original path again. The world is changing, he said, and not because of leaders, but because of fundamental changes like global warming and artificial intelligence. "We're seeing changes ... across the world in fundamental ways. And so, we better get going on what we're going to do about it, both in foreign policy and domestic policy."

But Biden went on to make the case that such fundamental change "presents enormous opportunities." He began by outlining the economic successes of his administration: more than 13.2 million new jobs -- including 810,000 jobs in manufacturing -- inflation coming down, and so on. He attributed that success to his administration's embrace of the country's older vision of investing in workers and the middle class rather than concentrating wealth at the top of the economy in hopes that the wealthy would invest efficiently. The administration focused on infrastructure and manufacturing, using measures like the CHIPS and Science Act and the Inflation Reduction Act to jump-start private investment in new industries in the U.S.

Then he turned to foreign affairs. "Does anybody think that the post-war eras still exist, the rules of the road from the end of World War Two?" he asked. The Atlantic Charter of August 1941 that defined a post-World War II order based that world on territorial integrity, national self-determination, economic growth, and alliances to protect those values. It was the basis for most of the postwar international institutions that have protected a rules-based order ever since.

But the world has changed, Biden said. In recognition of the new era, in June 2021, Biden and then-U.K. prime minister Boris Johnson signed a "New Atlantic Charter" to update the original. The new charter renews the U.S. commitment to the old one, then resolves "to defend the principles, values, and institutions of democracy and open societies," and to "strengthen the institutions, laws, and norms that sustain international co-operation to adapt them to meet the new challenges of the 21st century, and guard against those that would undermine them."

"Yesterday" Heather Cox continued, "Biden noted that his administration has shored up alliances around the world, just as he called for at the State Department back in February 2021 and in the New Atlantic Charter of June 2021. It helped to pull Europe together to support Ukraine against Russia's 2022 invasion, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) "is stronger today than it's ever been in its existence."

"The Indo-Pacific world is changing, with new alliances coming together to hold firm on the idea of a rules-based international order. Biden has supported 'the Quad' -- India, Japan, Australia and the United States -- to stop China from changing that order, and other countries are taking note, shifting toward support for that order themselves. Did 'anybody ever think Japan would increase its military budget over its domestic budget and help a European war on the side of the West?' Biden asked. 'That's what it's doing. It's changing the dynamic significantly.'"

"The world is changing in a big way," Biden said. "And we want to promote democracies. ... There is so much going on that we can make the world ... a lot safer and better and more secure." ... "So ... if you think about what's happening, there is a confluence, if we get this right, of both domestic economic policy and foreign policy. [It] can make [us] safer and more secure than we've been [for] a long, long time."

"For all that his talk was a heartfelt recap of his presidency, he emphasized that the key to those successes has been democratic institutions. Referring to President Bill Clinton's secretary of state Madeleine Albright's reference to the United States as 'the essential nation,' he attributed the leadership of the United States in world affairs not to its military might or economic power, but rather to its ability to create and defend alliances and, crucially, institutions that aspire to a rules-based world that works for, rather than against, ordinary people."

"Who could possibly bring the world together?" Biden asked. "Not me. But the President of the United States of America. Who could do it unless the President of the United States does it? Who? What nation could do it?" His vision was not the triumphalism of recent presidents; it reached back to the 1940s, to the postwar institutions that helped to rebuild Europe and create lasting alliances, and expanded that vision for the twenty-first century.

He recognized that U.S. policies have caused damage in the past, and that the country must fix things it has broken. "We're the ones who polluted the world," he said, for example. "We made a lot of money," and now the bill is coming due. And while the nation's postwar vision was centered on majority-white countries, he emphasized that the modern world must include everyone. "There's a whole lot at stake, he said, "And I think we have an opportunity. And one of the ways we make life better for us is make life better for the rest of the world. That's why I pushed so hard for the Build Back Better initiative to build the infrastructure in Africa...and in Latin America and South America."

Biden noted that the strength of the U.S. is in its diversity. "I said when I got elected I was going to have an administration that looked like America." He noted that there are a higher percentage of women in his Cabinet than ever before -- more than the number of men -- and that he had appointed more Black appellate court judges to the federal courts "than every other president in America combined." He did this for a simple reason, he said: "Our strength is our diversity. It's about time we begin to use it."

"The whole world is changing," Biden said, "But if we grab hold," he continued, "there's nothing beyond our capacity."

Heather Cox Richardson concluded, "If I were writing a history of the Biden administration 150 years from now, I would call out this informal talk as an articulation of a vision of American leadership, based not in economic expansion, military might or personalities, or even in policies, but in the strength of the institutions of democracy, preserved through global alliances." ... "So I guess I got to write about history today, after all."

Republicans once stood for a strong defense and standing by respected allies, and freedom from tyranny and expansive personal freedoms, and environmental protections, and women's rights and honorable stands on other important issues, but today they stand mainly for what the *MAGA* extremists in the Party want. This is wrong!

Truly,

Dr. Tiffany B. Twain

December 21, 2023