

Earth Manifesto



Commendable Causes and the Cure for the Culture of Corruption in Washington D.C.

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Dr. Martin Luther King expressed the evocative understanding in 1966, "Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhumane." Deep-seated injustices are involved in the plan formulated in 2017 by Republicans in Congress to kill Obamacare and give everyone earning more than \$250,000 per year a big tax break on their investment income. This largess would have given wealthy investors a total of more than \$700 billion in the following 10 years. The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office evaluated the poorly conceived Republican plan and found that it would likely cause a total of 22 million people to lose their medical insurance in a 10 year period, due to the provisions of the plan that would slash federal spending on Medicaid and health insurance credits for low income people. An egregious collateral effect of the law would have been to severely exacerbate injustices in our society.

In an article titled *It's Not Just Unfair: Inequality Is a Threat to Our Governance*, Angus Deaton proposed the creation of a single-payer health system, "not because I am in favor of socialized medicine, but because the artificially inflated costs of health care are powering up inequality by producing large fortunes for a few while holding down wages; the pharmaceutical industry alone had 1,400 lobbyists in Washington in 2014. American healthcare does a poor job of delivering health, but is exquisitely designed as an inequality machine, commanding an ever-larger share of G.D.P. and funneling resources to the top of the income distribution."

"There has never been a rollback of basic services to Americans like this, ever in U.S. history," said Bruce Siegel, president of America's Essential Hospitals, a coalition of about 300 hospitals that treat a large share of low-income patients in the U.S. "Let's not mince words. This bill will close hospitals. It will hammer rural hospitals, it will close nursing homes. It will lead to disabled children not getting services. ... People will die."

Healthcare policy decisions may be the most important and broadly affective of all decisions our leaders make, so they should work together more fairly and honestly to represent a broader range of constituencies than just rich people and CEOs and lobbyists for gigantic corporate entities like medical insurance companies, the pharmaceutical drug industry and fossil fuel conglomerates. Instead, Republican members of Congress are sabotaging the Affordable Care Act to give more tax cuts to the highest income earners, at the expense of tens of millions of Americans. They tried to kill Obamacare again at the end of 2017 without holding a single public hearing, crafting a bill in the Senate in secret, behind closed doors, with a committee of 13 men -- and no women. This was a form of power abuse by Strict Father Republicans that is a pathological aspect of *The Sixteen Worst Ways that Powerful People Abuse Power*.

With the manifest failures of Trump Republicans to protect the American people from the ravages of the global pandemic and its calamitous economic fallout, it became clear that politicizing public health measures and science, and inflaming tribal divisions and undermining democracy are treacherously wrongheaded efforts.

One of the criticisms Republicans have made of the Affordable Care Act is that it requires individuals to have health insurance. They took this politically expedient stance to generate fervor in opposition to Obamacare, but it is as though they don't understand the concept of insurance itself. Do they not understand the concept of spreading risk over a big pool, which is a central tenet of the insurance business? Will Republican politicians now turn their sights on the onerous requirements for all drivers to have vehicle insurance? Allowing people to save money by not having vehicle insurance would drive up the cost of insurance for everyone else who acts more responsibly and does buy insurance. In health insurance matters, every person is subject to getting diseases or having accidents, and there are many other afflictions and calamities that can befall anyone at any time.

A cynical point of view would hold that conservative politicians obviously don't give a good god damn how much hardship is suffered by the masses as a result of their policies and their pandering to CEOs and donors, as long as they can succeed at fooling enough of the populace and their fingerprints can be hidden and they can evade accountability for their treachery and enjoy the rotten fruits of their ambitions. To them, "It looks like a win!"

Cynics see the situation rather clearly. The same folks who pander so lasciviously to rich people engage in bootlicking the gun lobby and the NRA, at the cost of thousands of gun victims every year. They slavishly suck up to the right-wing judge factory of the Federalist Society, opprobriously cursing women with diminished rights and dignity and ability to have a voice in the course of their lives. They kowtow to fossil fuel conglomerates to let them maximize profits while causing disastrous alterations of planetary climate conditions and terrible assaults on wildlife and the biological diversity of life on Earth. They work assiduously to grab power, usurping it to abuse it, no matter how nefariously contrary to the will of the majority and the common good.

It would be a much better plan to create a fairer and more effective system by taking into account the needs and perspectives of all constituencies. A smarter single payer plan like a Medicare-for-all type system, for instance, would be vastly better because maximizing profits on insurance and prescription drugs would not be a main goal, and tens of millions of people would not be left behind without access to affordable medical care. Medical adversities are already the leading cause of bankruptcies in the United States, and it is crazy to create an expanding necessity for tens of millions of uninsured people in desperate circumstances to get their care in emergency rooms, which provide extremely expensive care. And who pays for this? Yep, everyone else that ever goes to a doctor or a hospital, in outrageously expensive medical bills and unnecessarily high insurance premiums. This sad aspect of our capitalist system resembles a sort of perverse socialist scam.

Meanwhile, Republicans were ramming through debt-financed tax cuts, and borrowing more money to cover the resulting shortfall in revenues, driving up the national debt. They finally passed the regressive Tax Cut Act just before Christmas 2017, without a single vote of support from Democrats on the other side of the aisle. This Act was a heartless, foolish, and fiscally irresponsible swindle. It is a national disgrace that the USA does not assure healthcare to all its citizens, as almost every other developed country in the world does.

The respect-worthy president Barack Obama offered a scathing critique of the Senate healthcare bill for its "fundamental meanness." He wrote in a Facebook post, "The Senate bill, unveiled today, is not a health care bill. It's a massive transfer of wealth from middle-class and poor families to the richest people in America." ... "Simply put, if there's a chance you might get sick, get old, or start a family -- this bill will do you harm," he wrote. "It would raise costs, reduce coverage, roll back protections, and ruin Medicaid as we know it, according to healthcare providers and non-partisan analysts." It would also have dramatically reduced healthcare services for millions of low-income women who get medical care from Planned Parenthood clinics.

"Those with private insurance would experience higher premiums and higher deductibles, with lower tax credits to help working families cover the costs, even as their plans might no longer cover pregnancy, mental health care, or expensive prescriptions," Obama wrote. "Discrimination based on pre-existing conditions could become the norm again. Millions of families will lose coverage entirely."

Barack Obama stated simply, "We didn't fight for the Affordable Care Act for more than a year in the public square for any personal or political gain -- we fought for it because we knew it would save lives, prevent financial misery, and ultimately set this country we love on a better, healthier course."

The greater good and expanding well-being should be higher priorities in critically important healthcare decisions made by our representatives. All 322 million Americans are affected, along with one-sixth of the entire U.S. economy. These decisions should not be made without public input, in secret, and they should not be allowed to favor the fortunes of the rich and powerful over the well-being and best interests of poor people and those in the middle class and the vast majority of women and children.

Republican politicians in Congress focused intensely in 2017 on trying to cook up a Trumpcare plan that would have severely exacerbated inequality in our society by cutting taxes on capital gains of high-income earners, according to the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office. They would have done this mainly by slashing federal spending on the Medicaid program, foisting the obligations onto already strapped state governments that cannot be relied upon

to handle the increased burden. Sensationally, nearly 50% of children born each year and their mothers receive medical care through Medicaid, and the proposed plan would have seriously disadvantaged them, as well as people with disabilities and tens of millions of people who would be offered insurance plans with more stingy benefits and higher deductible costs.

To understand the magnitude of proposed Republican tax breaks in the first Senate plan, the 400 richest families in the nation would have received an estimated \$33 billion in reduced taxes in the coming decade. This is equivalent to the amount the federal government spends on the Medicaid expansion in Alaska, Arkansas, Nevada and West Virginia combined, covering more than 700,000 people in total. It is scandalously sensational that the top Republican priority is to give more money to the richest Americans, who have no conceivable need whatsoever for this politically generated, debt-financed windfall for the few.

These were awful, mean and cruel proposals, for they would have resulted in millions of Americans being subjected to dire degrees of increased health insecurity and heightened risks of dying without medical coverage, and this would be done simply to give wealthy people lower tax rates on investment income. A review of the history of tax rates on capital gains would reveal that rich people are already getting a scandalously good deal, as it is.

After failing to repeal the Affordable Care Act because Senator John McCain voted against the Republican effort, Trump Republicans took to sabotaging the law. This money-corrupted effort is outrageously contrary to the common good.

The Cure for Corruption

Widespread public corruption is severely damaging our democracy, as adduced in the summary below of *The Top Ten Ways Conservatives Are Corrupting Our System*.

Here is the cure for corruption: First, clearly understand the big picture. Second, change management. Third, redesign and reprioritize the government, using top-notch architects guided by fair and clear-eyed objectives.

Voters must demand honesty and real responsibility from every representative. All prospective representatives of the people that are to be chosen in every future election should give their constituents good reason to have a high regard for their record in public service, and for their personal character as well. Con men, authority abusers, blatant influence peddlers and hypocrites,, please step aside. What part of honorable public service does the current batch of conniving Republican incumbents in Congress not understand?

Conservative politicians should stop opposing smart campaign finance reforms and ethics reforms, and sensible controls over pay-to-play politics and unethical lobbying. This is the only way for the people to be assured that legalized bribery in the USA will not continue to get worse in scope and consequence, as it does in corrupt banana republics.

We the People of the United States of America are being betrayed by radically "conservative" politicians who are intent on perpetrating financial swindles and causing wide-ranging environmental damages by exploiting divisive wedge issues to gain and maintain power. And they are abusing this power by imposing extremely undemocratic national policies and priorities on the populace. The U.S. government has been hijacked by these folks, and by the special interest groups that support them in their drive to achieve these nefarious goals.

The United States of America would have been governed from 2017 through 2021 by a Democratic president, a Democratic Senate and a Democratic House of Representatives if it were not for ten factors of corrupting influence, as set forth below. And conservative Justices would be in the minority on the Supreme Court, rather than having a majority of domineering judges who decide almost every case by giving too much influence to ideological and politically partisan interpretations of the Constitution and established rules of law.

Our Founders created an independent judiciary as one of the main planks in the checks and balances they designed into our Constitution to prevent despots from gaining harmfully excessive control over our government. Donald Trump pushed the bounds of presidential power so arrogantly that he violated the Constitution in many instances. For instance, the administration suffered a courtroom defeat in a case involving his attempt to withhold money from "sanctuary cities" when the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 7th

Circuit upheld a nationwide injunction that blocked the Justice Department from using "the sword of federal funding to conscript state and local authorities to aid in federal civil immigration enforcement."

In *The Daily 202*, James Hohmann observed in his article *Republican judges warn of 'tyranny' as they block Trump on 'sanctuary cities'* that Trump's legal defeat "offers yet another civics lesson about checks and balances for the first president in American history who lacks any prior governing or military experience. Unlike congressional Republicans who have by and large kowtowed and capitulated to Trumpism, despite private uneasiness and grumbling in many cases, Republican-appointed judges are free not to care about the wrath of the president or blowback from his loyalists. This gives them the breathing room to worry more about the rule of law than partisanship. That was the point of an independent judiciary and giving Supreme Court Justices lifetime appointments. It's how the Constitution is supposed to work."

Judge Ilana Rovner, who was appointed as a district court judge by Ronald Reagan and elevated to the circuit court by George H.W. Bush, "offers a remarkable rebuke of the Trump administration in a 35-page opinion that can be read as a tutorial on the separation of powers. She even throws around words like 'tyranny' that are not often seen in opinions of this nature." Judge Rovner wrote: "Our role in this case is not to assess the optimal immigration policies for our country. Rather, the issue before us strikes at one of the bedrock principles of our nation, the protection of which transcends political party affiliation and rests at the heart of our system of government." ... "The founders of our country well understood that the concentration of power threatens individual liberty, and so established a bulwark against such tyranny by creating a separation of powers among the branches of government."

Make no mistake about it, however, Republicans have stacked federal courts and the Supreme Court with extreme partisans who are most likely to side with Republicans in their stands for corporations and their abuses of power over the public health, well-being and the best interests of the people. The appointment of the excessively partisan Brett Kavanaugh should have been rejected in light of the deference he had expressed toward the presidency. Instead, some well-qualified judge like Merrick Garland, a consensus candidate before Republicans "went nuclear" on the judiciary, should have been appointed to the Supreme Court in his place.

Supreme Court Justices who choose to see no corrupting influence nor even the appearance of corruption in unlimited campaign contributions are blinded by their conservative ideologies to rationalize the irrational. It was retiring Justice Anthony Kennedy who wrote the contorted opinion in the *Citizens United* case with regard to election campaign spending: "We now conclude that independent expenditures, including those made by corporations, do not give rise to corruption or the appearance of corruption." Wow! If ignorance is bliss, conservatives are ecstatic, and so they seem to be, crowing about their ruthless hegemony over the people, who have been divided and pitted against each other -- immigrants and asylum seekers be damned. This is the shrewd strategy Trump Republicans have used to manipulate people into submission, in favor of allowing corporate entities and the wealthy to subvert democratic fairness and pervert our national policies.

The Top Ten Ways Conservatives Are Corrupting Our System

To eliminate any ambiguity about the scope and nature of scams committed by the Trump administration and its treacherous enablers in Congress, consider their brazen violations against Enlightenment Era principles upon which our founding ideals were based. Here are the Top Ten Ways that conservatives succeeded in these ruses. The following list constitutes a concise understanding of how the Republican Party is usurping power and broadly abusing this power to the detriment of the people.

1. They are engaging in extreme gerrymandering of congressional districts, unfairly giving Republicans 16 or 17 more seats in the House of Representatives in the 2016 elections than they would otherwise have gotten, according to the Brennan Center for Justice at the New York University School of Law, a non-partisan public policy and law institute that focuses on fundamental issues of democracy and justice. And since the 2020 Census, they have been using surgical precision to gerrymander further advantages in states like Texas.

2. They are pushing voter suppression tactics that deprive millions of American citizens of the right to vote. In the state of Georgia alone, it is estimated that this tactic has deprived 1.5 million people of the vote, skewing representation of the people toward the perpetrators of these schemes, like Brian Kemp, who used this tactic to

beat Stacey Abrams to become governor of Georgia in 2016. Kris Kobach, the disreputable former Secretary of State of Kansas, epitomizes this form of corruption incarnate.

3. Fox News, Inc. has weaponized propaganda and misinformation, and used extremely divisive emotion-hijacking and fear-mongering tactics and deceitful spin to give unwarranted support to Trump and conservative Republicans. Fox News also conspired with Republicans to discredit the Mueller investigation and the subsequent impeachment inquiry into the misdeeds of Trump and his campaign, transition team and scheming administration. Robert Mueller had a long record of integrity, in a stark contrast to Donald Trump's lifelong record of shady dealings, and the noose appeared to be closing. Anyone who has objectively watched Trump throughout his career knows exactly what he is, and what he always has been. Separate from his long history of race-baiting, he's also a liar, a cheat, and a tax evader. And those are exactly the kind of people drawn to serve him. So said the scholar and historian Ian Reifowitz.

The January 6 House Select Committee is now revealing damning disclosures that should disqualify Trump from ever again holding public office, and this should likewise disqualify his seditious co-conspirators, in accordance with provisions of the 14th Amendment, for their role in committing insurrection against the United States.

4. Republicans have taken advantage of the Supreme Court's wrongly decided *Citizens United* ruling to give excessive influence to corporate entities and wealthy people, allowing Machiavellian master manipulators who are following the playbook of dirty tricksters like Lee Atwater, Karl Rove, Roger Stone, Roger Ailes and Rupert Murdoch in corrupting our government. Their goal is to usurp power and abuse it to maximize profits, not to serve the greater good. The toxic influence of corporate money in our politics has stacked the deck against progressive values, and resulted in a U.S. Senate today that is beholden to special interests that want to further the system to help the rich get richer. "If we're going to take on this administration and the agenda of its wealthy donors, we have to get the influence of dark money out of our politics."

The failure to enact voting rights protections in January 2022, due to the staunch opposition to such needed reform by every Republican in the Senate along with Joe Manchin and Krysten Sinema, is another ugly turn in our politics that threatens to undo our democracy altogether.

5. Vladimir Putin's Russia hacked into Democratic Party websites to get information and voter profiles, and then weaponized this illicitly-obtained information by misusing profiles of tens of millions of Americans on social media platforms like Facebook, with the help of the now-defunct company Cambridge Analytica. Russia also engaged in sweeping cyber-interference in state election systems, and evidence indicates that Russian operatives are continuing their attempts to interfere in our elections. And Russia has also engaged in cyber-warfare against Western democracies with the intent of destabilizing democracy in the USA and disrupting alliances of Western democracies like NATO and the European Union. Russia is pursuing this strategy under Putin's autocratic leadership to gain geostrategic advantages and install corrupt puppet regimes of collaborating co-conspirators who will do things like push the domineering power of Oil Politics in the international economy.

6. The NRA acted as an evil organization, funneling money and support to conservative politicians to help them win their election contests. The NRA created dark rabble-rousing videos to help poison debate and wreak havoc on civility in the public sphere in order to perpetuate the profitability of gun sales.

7. Right-wing think tanks like the Heritage Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute and the Federalist Society have exerted excessive influence in getting Congress to pass legislation that is contrary to the best interest of the people.

8. Giant corporations, especially including Big Oil and Big Coal that oppose right action on climate change and renewable clean energy, are using the influence of their big profits to excessively influence our elections and our national policy-making.

9. Republican legislatures have not only engaged in extreme gerrymandering, but in pushing "model legislation" by ALEC, a corporate-funded organization that is changing rules of law to make it easier to rule corruptly, and quite contrary to the best interests of the people. They have been powerful pushers of getting right-wing judges appointed that are most likely to look away while all these scams and frauds take place.

ALEC is responsible for some of the most extreme and reactionary laws passed in the last decade, including "Stand Your Ground" gun legislation, racially discriminatory voter ID laws, roll-backs of environmental protections, initiatives that stifle the right to peaceful protest, and even efforts to create an Article V Constitutional Convention that would endanger virtually every right most Americans hold dear. "ALEC's member corporations pay top dollar for direct access to state lawmakers -- who then secretly draft model legislation that hurts our health, environment, public safety, and paychecks. Then, ALEC's legislators rush those bills through their statehouses, turning them into laws that enrich corporations at the expense of the rest of us."

Since the 2020 elections, ALEC has actively worked to undermine our democracy -- "pressuring lawmakers to question the validity of the 2020 election results, block reforms that would bring Big Money political spenders out into the open, and lock in another decade of unfair, gerrymandered legislative districts. That's right: ALEC is ... *eyeing even more extreme legislation in states across the country.*"

Emblematic of the nefarious influence of lobbyist organizations is the firm Black, Manafort and Stone, a Washington D.C. lobbying and political consulting firm started in 1982 that was known for having lobbyist insiders unethically sell access to the president and members of Congress. The insidious goal of this activity was to get our representatives to push policies narrowly favorable to their clients, which abroad included "some of the world's worst dictators -- mass murderers, terrorists, and tyrants."

Roger Stone is a friend and adviser to Donald Trump who once cynically declared that everybody in Washington D.C. is for sale, and that nobody is there to serve the public. He is a "dirty trickster" who regards morality as a weakness, and he is the ultimate insider who realized that he could promote Trump to gain power by fooling people into thinking he was trustworthy because he was "a Washington outsider". Stone was permanently banned from Twitter after he went on a tirade upon hearing CNN report that Robert Mueller approved the first charges in his investigation on the Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. elections. This meltdown included vulgarities and threats aimed at CNN reporters, according to *The Hollywood Reporter*. In January 2019, Roger Stone was arrested on seven counts related to false statements, witness tampering and WikiLeaks involvements in election scandals. He was found guilty on all accounts, and sent to prison. Then Trump used presidential pardon power with corrupt intent, giving Stone a legal pardon for his wrongdoing.

The inimical nature of Roger Stone's influence can be understood by seeing that he helped Trump gain power and influence by scapegoating immigrants, in a poisonous new twist to the racist Southern Strategy that has been used by scheming Republicans for 50 years to motivate white voters in the South to vote for conservative politicians by inflaming fears and prejudices against African Americans. This Southern Strategy followed many decades of Jim Crow laws and staunch opposition to integration and the Civil Rights Movement, coupled with widespread and far-reaching discrimination against black people. The new National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama highlights the role that the lynching of thousands of black men, women and children has played in terrorizing Blacks so that white supremacists can control and dominate them and keep them submissive. Millions of African Americans fled the South "as refugees from this racial terrorism." Black Lives should Matter more!

The key to formulating fairer national policies is to give fairer representation to all the people. This is also a key to really "making America great again."

10. The FBI Director James Comey intervened 11 days before the 2016 election by disclosing an investigation into Hillary Clinton's emails, while failing to give equal footing to the Bureau's investigations of much more serious Russian interference in our elections that helped Trump Republicans seize power.

The "culture of corruption" that pervades Washington D.C. includes not only misdeeds by Trump and people in his administration, but also by many persons in Congress. Emblematic of these are the charges against Congressman Chris Collins, who was arrested on charges of insider trading and lying to the FBI. The American people deserve better than this rampant culture of corruption, and its attendant blatant cronyism, pervasive self-enrichment scams, and astonishing incompetence and misguidance among Republicans in our nation's capitol.

An instance of this culture of corruption came to light in August 2018 when *Forbes Magazine* featured an article about Wilbur Ross, Trump's Secretary of Commerce. Wilbur Ross is a grifter, "obsessed with money and untethered to facts" and "a pathological liar", according to revealing characterizations. "It is difficult to imagine

the possibility that a man like Wilbur Ross, who Forbes estimates is worth some \$700 million, might steal a few million from one of his business partners. Unless you have heard enough stories about Ross. Over several months, in speaking with 21 people, Forbes uncovered a pattern: Many of those who worked directly with him claim that Ross wrongly siphoned or outright stole a few million here and a few million there ... all told, these allegations -- which sparked lawsuits, reimbursements and an SEC fine -- totaled more than \$120 million. If even half of the accusations are legitimate, the current United States secretary of commerce (in 2018) could rank among the biggest grifters in American history."

Under Donald Trump, the U.S. government resembled a "kleptocracy" -- a form of government with corrupt leaders who use their power to exploit the people and natural resources in order to increase the personal wealth and political powers of crony insiders and the rich. This involved money laundering and what is basically embezzlement of funds at the expense of the public. "Kleptocrats often conceal the funds they pilfer by having those operating on their behalf create anonymous shell companies to conceal the origins and ownership of the funds. These funds are often transferred from autocratic kleptocracies into the Western financial system via accounts that are subject to weak or nonexistent anti-money-laundering procedures. There, financial transactions conducted by the kleptocrat in a Western country complete the integration of the funds by purchasing an asset that can then be resold, providing a legally defensible origin of the funds. Research has shown the purchase of luxury real estate to be a particularly favored method."

Kleptocrats often use their laundered funds to engage in "reputation laundering" by hiring public relations firms to present a positive public image for them, and they employ lots of lawyers to oppose legal and journalistic scrutiny of their political connections and the real origins of their wealth.

"The United States is the favored jurisdiction for money laundering by kleptocrats around the world. In a 2011 forensic study of grand corruption cases, the World Bank found the United States was the leading jurisdiction of incorporation for entities involved in money laundering schemes. The U.S. Department of Treasury estimates that \$300 billion is laundered annually in the United States."

Trump Republicans are pushers of fanatical short-term expediencies. They are eager to sacrifice working people to capitalist profiteers and to foist terrible harms and impactful costs onto people by treating the providential ecosystems of our home planet like a business in liquidation. They compound this malfeasance by driving up the national debt to goose economic activities and primarily benefit the already rich. And they even criminally defraud the American people in their zealous pursuit of narrowly self-serving goals and a continued ability to cling to power.

Most philosophers and religious authorities say that love, not hate, is consistent with the social good, and it is surely best for fostering the crucial quality of social cohesion. And while love does trump hate, there are those like the political dirty trickster Roger Stone who point out that hate and fear are more powerful motivators than love. As a result, those Machiavellian master manipulators who propagate hate and stoke people's fears are able to succeed in getting votes and gaining power. This does not make it moral or acceptable in our democratic republic to gain political power through these merciless and immoral stratagems.

Only by cultivating healthier attitudes towards others can we best follow a path toward golden rule justice, and thereby toward a larger modicum of peaceable coexistence. Unfortunately for those who value justice and peace, our divisive partisan leaders are violating this reality.

Many people, especially "conservatives", seem to be brainwashed into believing things that simply aren't true. Like the contention that the best plan for our economy is to generate maximum amounts of profits -- and to give a bigger and bigger proportion of them to the rich -- because surely one of these days, benefits will start to trickle down, not just some relative crumbs. Inevitably, their blind trust in master manipulators results in worse extremes of inequality, insecurity and austerity for the masses.

Donald Trump is a horrible candidate for fulfilling the serious responsibility of protecting our freedoms and well-being. He is a demagogue, shameless braggart and elitist who demonstrates hubristic tendencies toward imposing despotic autocratic rule, and he was not honestly concerned with "draining the swamp" of politicians who oppose worker rights or consumer protections from the predations of bankers. He was not concerned with adequately protecting people's health, or clean air and clean water, or of giving the environmental commons adequate

protections from irresponsibly excessive resource exploitation by profiteers. He also has significantly sabotaged safeguards in our democratic republic that protect democracy itself. And he broadly threatens what really matters most in our lives: our American values, personal freedoms, hopes of more broadly shared economic well-being, a more just society, domestic tranquility, social cohesion, and expectations that our government will be a force for creating overall more inclusive fairness. Trump Republican politicians threaten the truest expressions of individual and national security, and undermine fundamental principles that serve as a bedrock in preserving our democratic republic.

Having benefited hugely from the connivance between the Trump campaign and Russian hackers and Russian troll farms (like the nefarious Internet Research Agency in Saint Petersburg), it is no surprise that Trump has shown little interest in election security for future elections. Trump in fact leveraged divisive conflicts and election insecurity to gain power. And his repetitious telling of big lies about widespread election fraud and his inciting of insurrection against Congress are both criminal and unacceptable.

Amid intensifying concerns that Russia was continuing efforts to interfere in our elections before the 2018 midterms, Republicans in the U.S. Senate actually voted down a measure that would have directed \$250 million more toward bolstering election security, despite warnings from the U.S. intelligence community that such efforts were taking place. The close vote on this issue was 50 to 47, falling far short of the needed 60 votes to include the \$250 million amendment, proposed by Senator Patrick Leahy, in an appropriations package the Senate was considering for approval.

Trump acted like a *de facto* agent of Russia. Mission accomplished for Putin and the Russian Internet Research Agency. The extent to which this Russian agency tried to influence public opinion using social media became better known after a June 2014 BuzzFeed article expanded on government documents published by hackers earlier that year. The agency gained more attention by June 2015 when one of its offices was reported as having data from fake accounts used for Internet trolling. Subsequently, there were news reports of individuals receiving monetary compensation for performing these tasks.

The Internet Research Agency employed fake accounts registered on major social networks, discussion boards, online sites and video hosting services to promote the Kremlin's interests in its domestic and foreign policies, including in Ukraine and the Middle East, in addition to influencing the 2016 elections in the U.S. More than 1,000 employees reportedly worked in a single building of the agency in 2015 to accomplish these deeds.

In a report issued by the U.S. Intelligence Community in January 2017 titled *Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent US Elections*, the Internet Research Agency was described as a troll farm. "The likely financier of the so-called Internet Research Agency of professional trolls located in Saint Petersburg is a close Putin ally with ties to Russian intelligence." The report noted, "they previously were devoted to supporting Russian actions in Ukraine -- and started to advocate for President-elect Trump as early as December 2015."

In February 2018, a U.S. grand jury indicted 13 Russian nationals and 3 Russian entities, including this notorious Kremlin-linked online Russian influence operation the Internet Research Agency, on charges of violating criminal laws to interfere with U.S. elections and political processes, according to the Justice Department.

Robert Mueller and his team of investigators, who made an Investigation into Russian Interference in the 2016 Presidential Election, charged that these individuals and agencies with meddling in the 2016 election by having spread Russian propaganda that helped Trump Republicans illegitimately seize domineering One-Party power in the USA. This is treachery against the people of the United States.

Facebook, Twitter and other social media platforms are too easily manipulated by bad actors who are able to spread propaganda and divisive misinformation and conspiracy theories and hate on their Internet platforms. Better regulation is needed. Free speech is not free of consequences. Consequential ethics should guide us in assessing how best to regulate social media, since it seems incapable or unwilling to adequately circumvent things like these troll farm attacks, and they wrongly give top priority to maximizing their corporate profits.

Trump officials initially denied that any contacts had taken place with Russian officials during the 2016 campaign, then when numerous instances of contact surfaced (Jeff Sessions, Jared Kushner and others), they resorted to

denying that any collusion had taken place. Throughout this administration, many officials suspiciously acted like they were as guilty as hell. In July 2018, the weak Trump defense team began pivoting from denials of collusion to asserting that collusion is not a crime.

As the hot pandemic summer of 2020 passed, panic seemed to be setting in, and Trump became dangerously desperate to cling to power, knowing how serious his violations of law, propriety, social responsibility and the Constitution have been. He had been tweeting with increasing fury against all the investigations into the many individuals in the Trump orbit involved in suspect activities, both with Russia and with other fraudulent activities, like those committed by Trump loyalists who have already pleaded guilty to various crimes like lying to the FBI to cover up their involvements.

Prosecutors in New York are investigating Trump and the Trump Organization for various fraudulent activities. They want Eric Trump and Allen Weisselberg, the Trump Organizations chief financial officer, to testify about the shell company that made hush money payments to keep former playboy bunny Karen McDougal from revealing her romantic and sexual affair with Donald Trump, just two months before the 2016 presidential election. Disgustingly, this was while Trump's third and current wife Melania, an immigrant from Slovenia, was nursing their son Barron.

Eric Trump was finally forced to testify in a deposition in October 2020, and he invoked his Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination in response to more than 500 questions over a 6-hour period. The guilt that this covers up may well be revealed by on-going investigations.

Things had gotten real interesting when Michael Cohen, Trump's former personal lawyer and "fixer", published a damning tell-all book about his activities that helped enable Trump's many misdeeds. Cohen went to prison for his actions, but Trump managed to evade accountability once again. The prospects for him to continue to get away with all of his many transgressions seem to be diminishing as the year 2022 unfolds.

Republicans in Congress have been kowtowing to Trump, and have been going along with his subversive and deeply dishonest efforts to regain power, no matter how scandalous, improper or illegal. Even one month after Trump lost the 2020 election, more than 100 Republicans in Congress and 18 attorneys general filed a lawsuit trying to overturn the election outcome on grounds so flimsy that the Supreme Court refused to hear it.

Some Republicans occasionally profess to be disturbed by Trump's behavior, outbursts and schemes, but they generally still fail to speak out with ethical conviction. One main reason that our Founders established strong checks and balances in our government, with an independent judiciary, was to ensure proper accountability of the executive branch. The judiciary was given co-equal status so that judicial responsibility would uphold fealty to the Constitution and rules of law, and be independent from abuses of power by the president and members of the administration and Congress.

Perspectives Explained by Linguist George Lakoff

In my riff about Movement Conservatism in *A Sharp Analysis and Scathing Critique of Misguided and Misguiding American Leaders*, I mention the divisive wedge driven between American citizens by conservatives who promote an extreme ideological framework that includes a whole constellation of Strict Father values, and contrasting Nurturing Parent values that they undermine. Nurturing Parents demonstrate empathetic concern for people and protect them from abuses of power by corporations and governments.

Here was an evaluation of this perspective in the Original Earth Manifesto in 2004 (Book Nine of the Earth Manifesto):

The extraordinarily far-reaching and increasingly extensive and harmful impacts that humanity is having on the ecosystems of Planet Earth make it critical for us to better understand the pragmatic and moral impulses that drive human beings. All ethical, political and social philosophies and beliefs can be understood in terms of competing family morality worldviews. These are deeply seated archetypes that are correlated in a fascinating way with parenting and child development theories.

Conservatism is characterized by a moral conception that respects strength, strict discipline, male authority, tradition, orthodox views, self-righteousness, "law-and-order" and an impulse to dominate and control. It

embraces the Strict Father ethic that emphasizes self-reliance, self-responsibility, self-discipline and self-denial, and is associated with a whole constellation of values that revolve around strength and puritanism as right and proper. Those who espouse conservatism champion high levels of spending on an extremely strong military and harsh punishment for wrong-doing; they support the Death Penalty; they advocate minimal regulation of business and other laissez-faire doctrines; they demand regressive changes in taxation that give tax breaks to the wealthy; they dogmatically propound a moral rectitude that tries to provide a superior moral justification for authoritarian rule; they advocate gun ownership with minimal restrictions; they tend to be puritanical in their sexual views, intolerantly opposing pre-marital sex and homosexuality; fundamentalists among them oppose sex education, contraception and the freedom to choose a legal and safe abortion; they often oppose measures that offer dignity in dying; and they effectively believe in a rigidity of roles for men and women in which men have more prerogatives, privileges, power and control than women.

In contrast, Progressivism is characterized by a moral conception that respects fairness and empathy. It embraces a Nurturing Parent ethic that highly values helping others, demonstrating compassion, supporting programs for social justice, and advocating freethinking, good communication and empowerment and equality for women. It is associated with a whole constellation of values that revolve around basic human rights. Those who espouse progressive ideas strive to protect people and the environment from inequities, harmful exploitation and unscrupulous business activities; they advocate actions consistent with the common good, like more broadly fair progressively structured taxation, peaceful conflict resolution, tightly controlled military spending, cooperative statesmanship, good neighbor policies, smart environmental regulations, a safety net of humanitarian social programs, true justice rather than harsh retributive punishment, the freedom of reproductive choice, increased safety of firearms that features a ban on public ownership of assault weapons and armor-piercing ammunition, and equal rights for women and men.

These family morality worldviews cannot be judged definitively 'right' or 'wrong', according to the perceptive linguist George Lakoff. A main difference is that conservatism is much more committed to achieving and perpetuating its own ends, regardless of whether the means are fair. Therefore, it is much more willing to *have people suffer harm*, as they exert control and have their greed-driven and power-abusing way.

Progressives need to step up and relegate extreme conservatism to a minority party status again!

Cult-like Followers Enable the Culture of Corruption

The Republican Party right now resembles a full-blown cult much more than a legitimate political party. Look at any description of the defining features of a cult and you will recognize not only Trump, but his devout followers, who are blindly loyal to him through every scandal, every gaffe, every hypocrisy, and every blow to their very health and livelihoods. These followers willingly betray even their most highly held ideals in excusing his deplorable behavior. They imagine different versions of reality when the one they live in seems to be at odds with the one spun by the "unreliable narrator", their cult leader.

Cults follow no logic, and often make no sense. Cult authorities prey on the weak, the downtrodden, the angry, the gullible and the disillusioned. Moreover, there are far too many of them. "In fact, in a period of time that constitutes a blip in our history books, a cult has taken over a major political party," wrote the ex-Mormons Sam and Tanner. They elaborate: "Cults aren't as easy to spot as you might think. Most cults don't wear robes or live in communes. In fact, most cult members don't even realize they're in a cult. During my 25 years as an unwitting cult member, I would often watch documentaries and read about other cults. As I researched, I noticed 10 specific patterns that helped me recognize that I myself was in a cult:"

1. The leader is the ultimate authority. If you're not allowed to criticize your leader, even if the criticism is true, you're probably in a cult. Cults begin with a charismatic leader who claims some supreme knowledge. They may call themselves a prophet, messiah, messenger or an enlightened teacher. They can also be CEOs, military officials, politicians or self-help gurus. Cult leaders convince members to forfeit their critical thinking ability in return for a sense of belonging, authority and purpose. To members, it doesn't matter what the evidence or logic may suggest, the leader is always right, and their misdeeds are always justified. Criticism of the leader is forbidden.

2. The group suppresses skepticism. If you're only allowed to study your organization through approved sources, you're probably in a cult. Cults view critical thinking as an infectious disease and every effort is made to suppress it. Doubting members are encouraged to isolate themselves from outside influences and focus solely on the doctrine of the cult. Criticism is forbidden and people who contradict the group are viewed as persecutors and are often given labels like "anti," "apostate," or "suppressive person." Members are discouraged from reading or thinking anything critical of the group.

3. The group delegitimizes former members. If you can't think of a legitimate reason for leaving your group, you're probably in a cult. Because the cult considers itself the ultimate authority on truth, it can't imagine anybody leaving it with their integrity intact. Thus, it has to perpetuate a false narrative that former members were deceived, proud, immoral or lazy. If former members speak out, they are dismissed as bitter, angry, dishonest or evil. Cults often impose some kind of shunning to shame former members and prevent them from infecting other members with the truth.

4. The group is paranoid about the outside world. If your group insists the end of the world is near, you're probably in a cult. Cults position themselves as the sole refuge from an evil outside world that is intent on their destruction. Cults thrive on conspiracy theories, catastrophic thinking and persecution complexes. In an effort to draw in more committed members, cults are often very aggressive in their recruitment efforts which are usually justified as "saving" people from the evil world. Those who reject the cult's message are regarded as unselect, prideful or stupid.

5. The group relies on shame cycles. If you need your group in order to feel worthy, loved or sufficient, you're probably in a cult. Cult leaders trap members in shame cycles by imposing abnormally strict codes of conduct (usually prescriptions about diet, appearance, sex, relationships and media), and guiltning members for their shortcomings, and then positioning themselves as the unique remedy to the feelings of guilt which they themselves created. Cult members are made to believe they are insufficient or unworthy on their own, and that the only way to become worthy is to confess their shortcomings to the group or leader. The leader then becomes the mediator of worthiness and the foundation of the member's self esteem. Leaders who can make followers feel bad about anything can use shame to manipulate followers into doing anything, even if it's against their own self-interest or better judgment.

6. The leader is above the law. If you're held to a different moral standard, specifically in regard to sex, you're probably in a cult. A prevalent idea among cult leaders is that they are above the law, be it human or divine. This idea allows them to exploit their followers economically and sexually without repercussions. When confronted, they do not confess, but create justifications for their impropriety. Sexual grooming of members is common. Loyal cult members will perform any amount of "mental gymnastics" to justify or ignore any of the leader's bad behaviors.

7. The group uses "thought reform" methods. If your serious questions are answered with clichés, you're probably in a cult. Indoctrination or "brainwashing" is the process through which a cult slowly breaks down a person's sense of identity and ability to think rationally. Behaviors like excessive fasting, prayer, hypnosis, scripture reading, chanting, meditation or drug usage can all be used to increase a person's vulnerability to the leader's suggestions. The hallmark of indoctrination is the use of thought-terminating clichés. Platitudes like "follow the leader" or "doubt your doubts" are regurgitated over and over so that members don't have to critically analyze complex issues.

8. The group is elitist. If your group is the solution for all the world's problems, you're probably in a cult. Cults see themselves as the enlightened, chosen and elect organization tasked with radically transforming individual lives and the entire world. This elitism creates greater sense of group unity and responsibility centered on a united purpose. However, this sense of responsibility is often manipulated by cult leaders who coerce members into risky financial behavior, sexual favors, free manual labor or heightened recruitment efforts in order to "further the cause."

9. There is no financial transparency. If you're not allowed to know what the group does with their money, you're probably in a cult. A group that refuses to disclose its finances is a huge red flag. Ethical organizations have

nothing to hide. Cult leaders tend to live opulently while their followers are required to make financial sacrifices. Members are often encouraged to pay offerings even if it means putting their own families at risk.

10. The group performs secret rites. If there are secret teachings or ceremonies you didn't discover until after you joined, you're probably in a cult. Cults use secret rituals as rites of passage that solidify a member's loyalty to the group. Initiation into these rites usually only comes after a member has undergone certain tests or made adequate financial contributions. Often, cult initiations are confusing, bizarre or offensive. This mental dissonance between their sense of confusion and their loyalty to the "inner circle" convinces the initiate to double their efforts in order to properly appreciate the proceedings. This only further entrenches them in a shame cycle, making them even more susceptible to manipulation.

"Okay, so if the party of Trump is a full-blown cult, the next logical question is ... how do you convince people to leave cults?" Surely, in our democracy, despite the setbacks that have been suffered at the hands of the authority-abusing people in Donald Trump's illegitimate kakistocracy, *We the People* can see the Big Picture and unite to throw the bums out of office, and we should join together, proceeding open-eyed into the future, guided by fairer and smarter plans, more inclusive political representation, sustainable priorities, and more honest and responsible leaders.