

Earth Manifesto



Tiffany Twain Tells a Tantalizing Tautological Truth

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It is a simple tautological truth that the vast majority of Americans will be significantly better off *ONLY* when the vast majority of Americans are actually significantly better off.

And the devil is in the details: "How the hell do we get our leaders to honestly work together to actualize this eminently salubrious goal of really creating a healthier, saner and more equitable and inclusive society?"

Right now, as the pandemic wanes after more than four long years and over 1.2 million victims dying in the U.S., we can clearly see that to achieve this goal, we should begin to honestly, comprehensively and fairly "build back better." This necessarily involves addressing the biggest and most stubborn challenges we face: improving public health and safety, dealing effectively with climate change, remedying systemic racial and environmental injustices, reversing extreme economic inequalities, and denying power to scheming politicians and corrupting corporate entities that abuse influence and authority.

What stands athwart broadly beneficial and surpassingly positive and propitious solutions to big problems? Ah yes, rich people abusing the influence of their money and power, and privileged people taking excessive advantage of their great good fortune. In this, they are aided by religious fundamentalists who side with powerful people over the powerless and disenfranchised by pushing narrowly doctrinaire theological and temporal agendas. Shrewdly scheming politicians pander to these folks to satisfy their own selfish ambitions and greedy compulsions and strong drives to control others, thereby treacherously defending the corruptly rigged systems that allow the proverbial Few to cheat and oppress the many more Many.

Senator Paul Wellstone of Minnesota believed that politics should NOT be solely about power, money and winning at any cost. He once said, "Politics is about the improvement of people's lives. It's about advancing the cause of peace and justice in our country and in the world." We should really try to make this happen! We need honorable public servants who will truly represent the best interests of their constituents -- not just those of big donors.

Professor Robert Reich provides excellent insights in his book *Supercapitalism* that tells us how to achieve such better ways forward. In general, the goals of businesses and consumers and investors have been given too much sway in our societies, and more vital "good citizenship goals" and long-term prosperity have been subordinated to greed and the narrowly-focused aims of special interest groups. Too much power is given to corporations and their CEOs to pursue benefits for themselves and the investors and speculators who get most of the spoils of profit-obsessed goals. As a result, the compulsive drive to make money in the short-run wrongfully takes greater precedence over the common good and sustainable existence. This negatively affects working people and the well-being of most people in their communities, and harms the health of the environment as well.

These adverse outcomes are being promoted through shortsighted objectives and irresponsible expediencies, along with fraudulent swindles and rulings like the Supreme Court's *Citizens United* decision that gives determinative influence to rich people and giant corporations by allowing unlimited campaign donations, often in secret. Corporate entities invest some of the huge largess of Tax Cut policies into further legalized bribery to advance their greed-driven excessive profitability.

As we plan intelligently to build back better in recovering from the pandemic, we should accurately understand the world to make sure we achieve this goal in safer, healthier, more sustainable ways. This is key to improving the quality of life, and informing and guiding our public policy decisions and the setting of priorities.

The pandemic has sharpened our attention to our mortality and the fear of death, and has made people feel a contrasting increase in awareness of the potential pleasures of life. As John Fowles insightfully observed in *The Aristos*, "One consequence of our renewed awareness of death must be, and has been, an alarming growth of both national and individual selfishness, a Gadarene rush to enjoy the pleasures of the shops and senses before they close for ever, for it has not been the economic conditions that have fostered the current desire to spend and enjoy regardless of the historical situation, but ever more nakedly seen death that has created the tomorrow-we-die economic conditions." He said, "Such terms as 'affluent society' and 'conspicuous consumption' are euphemisms, in the context of our poverty-stricken and starvation-ridden world, for selfishness."

Clear-Eyed Commentary

"The true rule, in determining to embrace, or reject any thing," Abraham Lincoln once said, "is not whether it have any evil in it; but whether it have more of evil, than of good."

What specifically should we rightly do to responsibly remedy the problems we face today, given how critically divided the electorate is and how wrongful the provisions are of our rigged economic and political system? To fix things, we should strengthen our democracy by making it more fairly representative. A top goal in a fairer democracy should be to improve representation of all citizens and their needs. Accompanying this new direction, we should institute more effective anti-corruption measures, and make stronger efforts to reduce inequality by creating more broadly shared opportunities for education, good jobs, prosperity and well-being. Adequate controls on banking and stricter limitations on unacceptable corporate abuses of influence should also be put into place, as well as voting rights protection reforms like those passed by Democrats in the House under Nancy Pelosi, with the Freedom to Vote Act and the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act.

And in the interests of all Americans under the age of 18, who cannot vote, and every one of those to be born in the future, the USA and every nation around the globe should ratify a Bill of Rights for Future Generations, as proposed in this manifesto. In addition, revolutionarily good plans should be put into effect as recommended in *One Dozen Big Initiatives to Positively Transform Our Societies*.

So, my fellow Americans: ask not how our economic system can be rigged to be of greater personal benefit to you, ask what you can do to help make our nation fairer and more widely prosperous in the here and now, and how to ensure that our world will remain healthy and sustainable for generations to come. Let us hear the ringing of bells of individual freedom and responsibility, and thus support this overarching cause, seeing it to be just, for it should be clear for whom the bell tolls -- and it tolls for all of us.

As vaccines against the coronavirus protect more and more people from the worst ravages of the miserable contagion's physical harms, it should be a top priority to make sure we actually do recover in ways that are fairer and smarter than the pre-pandemic status quo. As the threat of contagious disease diminishes, people are trying to resume their "normal" lives. They are going back to indulging in mass consumerism and mass tourism with a profligate wave of spending. That means freeways, roads and tourist destinations are getting clogged with cars. Holidays like Christmas will once again feature spending large sums of money on conspicuous consumption and useless items and "time-saving gadgets", much of which will end up in landfills (like 99% of everything we buy does, within 6 months of purchase). "Will we once again be persuaded by advertisers that buying things is the way to happiness and social prestige?" (Probably, considering how seductive marketing is.)

A Riff on Visionary True Responsibility

Theodore Roosevelt made a sensibly astute observation in his *Speech to the Colorado Live Stock Association* in Denver, Colorado in August 1910: "The nation behaves well if it treats the natural resources as assets which it must turn over to the next generation increased, and not impaired, in value."

Humankind is converting natural resource assets into cash almost as fast as possible, and showing pathologically little restraint by hyper stimulating this profligate effort with record levels of debt stimulus. Recognizing this,

one would be extraordinarily well justified in stating that we are treating our home planet like a highly vulnerable company targeted by predatory capitalists who run private equity firms that buy businesses using huge amounts of debt leveraging and then break them up, extracting huge fees and laying off employees to maximize profits on the amoral and empathy-deficient activity. To compound the ecological insanity of destructive and depletionary schemes like this, private equity capitalists invest some of the Big Money proceeds they make on transactions like this to buy politicians and corrupt governments to get away with this scam while paying the smallest possible amount of tax on the rotten spoils they gain.

Consider this insight-revealing digression. One of the most outrageous and indefensible tax breaks in the U.S. tax code is the "carried interest provision", which allows wealthy hedge fund managers and private equity moguls to pay low long-term capital gains rates of 15% on their profits, compared with 37% owed for ordinary income in the top bracket (in 2024). Barack Obama, during his first Presidential campaign, pledged to increase taxes on carried interest and, in 2012, went after Mitt Romney for having enjoyed its benefits as the co-founder of Bain Capital. Bernie Sanders, Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump all attacked the loophole during the 2016 election campaign, often using hedge-fund managers as the rhetorical target. As Trump put it, "They're paying nothing, and it's ridiculous. ... These are guys that shift paper around and they get lucky."

With all the hyper partisan stands taken on issues that face us in the world today, including the climate crisis, gun safety issues, women's reproductive rights, immigration, and requiring mask wearing and getting vaccinated during the pandemic, it is revealing that tax laws are among the most politically determined laws of all, for they involve money and the top priority rich people place on paying low rates of tax. For anyone who might have ever wondered how it is possible that the American people have been unable to get rid of the "carried interest provision", which gives extremely high-earning private equity moguls lavishly generous loopholes for paying low tax rates on windfall profits, I heartily recommend reading all about it in the succinct, incisive and sensational story that Matt Taibbi told about Mitt Romney in his 2012 article *Greed and Debt: The True Story of Mitt Romney and Bain Capital -- How the GOP presidential candidate and his private equity firm staged an epic wealth grab, destroyed jobs -- and stuck others with the bill.*

One measure of the political corruption inherent in government that is excessively influenced by moneyed interests was found in a bombshell report published by the U.S. Treasury that revealed the richest 1% of Americans are getting away with not paying more than \$160 billion they owe in taxes each year. This state of affairs has been facilitated by cutting IRS funding by almost 20% over the prior decade, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. As a consequence, the IRS lost more than 33,000 employees between 2010 and 2020, including those that audit returns and collect unpaid taxes. These cuts resulted in the IRS auditing fewer than 2 out of every 100 taxpayers earning more than \$1 million in 2020.

Due to the IRS being so underfunded and understaffed, millionaires are far less likely to be audited than they used to be. "Just collecting all unpaid taxes from the richest 1% would generate at least \$1.75 trillion over the next decade." Despite the fact that inequality has spiked in recent years, our unjust tax system has at the same time allowed the richest Americans to finagle their way out of paying billions of dollars in taxes each year. Funding for the IRS to beef up enforcement would help collect unpaid taxes from the richest Americans, and it would be an excellent investment, because every additional \$1 of IRS funding yields an estimated \$3 of tax revenue, mostly from the very rich who illegally avoid paying taxes owed. Conservatives, of course, are zealously eager to give millions of dollars to every billionaire while being reluctant to giving \$100 to the neediest.

A Profoundly Perplexing Existential Paradox

A perplexing paradox confronts humanity in the world today. We rely on instinctive impulses and conditioned habits that motivate us to consume and use up natural resources with little regard for the sustainability of these resources to provide for the needs of people in the future. Our growth-addicted capitalist economic system relies on marketing-stoked desires and materialistic compulsions that are depleting mineral and fresh water resources, as well as destroying habitats, wiping out native wildlife, and driving many species of life toward eternal extinction. Simultaneously, many costs of pollution, toxins, waste and ecological damages are being allowed to be foisted upon the society and future generations. In addition, our biological drive to reproduce is becoming a Faustian bargain

with the devil, because many people want to force pregnant women to have unwanted children, whether or not they can afford to raise them, and irrespective of natural limits on the carrying capacity of Earth's natural ecosystems to support our burgeoning human numbers and expanding needs.

Henk Ovink, a Dutch climate-change guru, says that planning for climate change requires a sweeping societal transformation -- in personal habits, in the way cities are planned, in the resources we extract, transport and exploit, and in the politics of energy. There is a paradox here too, in that climate action demands a combination of both urgency and patience. "We have no time to waste, but we also have to think in terms of generations to come. Cultural change never comes overnight."

Caged canaries were carried into underground coal mines for many years to serve as early warning systems to alert miners of dangerous buildups of methane or carbon monoxide that could kill workers. Today, scientists are symbolically serving as similar early indicators of dangerous conditions by warning us of great dangers associated with deteriorating conditions on Earth caused by uncontrolled emissions of heat-trapping greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Something like 97% of all climate scientists agree that climate change poses far-reaching risks, and the other 3% are generally being paid by well-funded interest groups to sow doubt about this issue. Astonishingly, more than one-third of Americans are said to believe there is some doubt that our rash burning of fossil fuels is creating ever-more costly natural disasters and proliferating future risks. It is as if these doubters believe that the temperature in a greenhouse might actually be cooler than the temperature outside it. We should heed scientific warnings, not deny them -- this is a moral imperative!

Senator Whitehouse Weighs In

Rhode Island Senator Sheldon Whitehouse tells us, "Wake Up!" The U.S. Senator admirably made 279 weekly addresses in the Senate on the need for climate action over a period of nearly nine years. When he made his 100th weekly speech on climate change on May 18, 2015, he decried "the sophisticated scheme of denial being conducted by the polluters." Here are some of the incisive observations he made at that time:

Climate change tests us. First, it is an environmental test, a grave one. We will be graded in that test against the implacable laws of science and nature. Pope Francis has described a conversation with a humble gardener who said to him: "God always forgives. Men, women, we forgive sometimes. But creation never forgives."

There are no do-overs, no mulligans -- not when we mess with God's laws of nature. Behind nature's test looms a moral test. Do we let the influence of a few wealthy industries compromise other people's livelihoods, even other people's lives, all around the planet and off into the future?

It is morally wrong, in greed and folly, to foist that price on all those others. That is why Pope Francis is bringing his moral light to bear on climate change, and to quote him: "There is a clear, definitive and ineluctable ethical imperative to act." Our human morality is being tested.

Anybody who is paying attention knows those special interests are lying. Anybody paying attention knows they are influence-peddling on a monumental scale. And while the polluters have done their best to hide that their denial tentacles are all part of the same denial beast, people all over who are paying attention have figured it out. "If you are a Senator who is not sure climate change is real, manmade and urgent, ask your home State University. Even in Kentucky. Even in Oklahoma."

Dr. Riley Dunlap of Oklahoma State University assessed the "organized climate-denial machine." He found that nearly 90 percent of climate-denial books published between 1982 and 2010 had ties to conservative fossil fuel-funded think tanks, such as the Heartland Institute. In other words, it is a scam.

One day, there will be a reckoning. There always is. If we wake up, if we get this right, if we turn that ponderous balance of destiny in our time, then it can be their reckoning, and not all of ours.

Anthropogenic climate disruption is happening across the globe, and Pope Francis has been outspoken in saying that climate change will "affect all of humanity, especially the poorest and future generations. What's more, it represents a serious ethical and moral responsibility." So we need to responsibly embrace a forward-looking movement to change the dangerously retrograde aspects of the status quo. Interestingly, social and political

change doesn't take place as a steady and incremental process, but instead it proceeds through a kind of punctuated equilibrium of relatively long periods of stability, interrupted by sudden bursts of rapid change that are "catalyzed by disruptions in pre-existing systems". This is what Paul Hawken called *Blessed Unrest*.

Such destabilizing developments create instability that can shatter conventional ways of doing things, often freeing up resources and leading to fundamental reorganizations of economic, social and livelihood systems. Natural disasters like floods, droughts and wildfires can create powerful impulses for change. In the aftermath of natural disasters, people are more aware of risks they face and factors contributing to their vulnerabilities, so the physical and social disruption that disasters bring often upsets the entrenched status quo. Economic, social and political systems then come under greater scrutiny for putting people at risk, and greater pressure arises for underlying risks to be dealt with fairly. Also, an influx of disaster relief assistance can provide needed resources to facilitate changes that would be impossible under normal circumstances. Thus, disasters and crises provide windows of opportunity in which real social change can take place. (Why wait for calamity?!)

A Square Deal, A New Deal, and A Bad Deal

Decades after Theodore Roosevelt advocated a fair *Square Deal*, President Franklin D. Roosevelt implemented a *New Deal* that established a social security safety net for Americans in the wake of capitalism's disastrous speculative excesses of the 1920s and the subsequent severe Depression. In contrast, Ronald Reagan offered the American people what was effectively a *Bad Deal*, in which he radically stimulated inequalities by enacting changes in taxation that gave rich people significantly more after-tax income. He packaged this scam in shining rhetoric and freedom-ringing ideological narratives, but history is proving that his tax-cutting initiatives were sold with deceptive and erroneous rationalizations, and are leading to unsustainable debt and damages to the prospects of the average person in our country. Then the Tea Party came along in 2010 and insisted on *No Deal*, trying to shut down the government and threatening to default on our national debt obligations and refusing to compromise on almost every issue. With the advent of the "Freedom Caucus" in the House of Representatives and then the chaos-engendering election of Trump, the American people in our "post-truth" political world were told they were going to be given a *Great Deal*, but the devil is in the details, and the reality is that Republicans gave us a disastrous and deadly *Rotten Deal*, especially with respect to public health and the environment.

Mark Summer, a "Lefty Blogger" for Daily Kos, contended that beginning in "the time of Newt Gingrich," Republicans "realized they could simultaneously weaken the government, complain about the failure of programs they had just sabotaged, and create a perpetual-motion machine of government destruction ... Republicans [would] take on anything, no matter how insane, so long as it kept dragging the conversation ever rightward."

This point of view has a visceral ring of truth to it, making it crazy that huge amounts of money will be given to support Republican politicians due to the fact that Congress has abjectly failed to enact fair-minded campaign finance reform and voting rights guarantees -- and due to the wrongly-decided Supreme Court ruling by partisan conservatives that gives Big Money domineering and blatantly corrupt influence on our national politics.

Recognizing and Rejecting Ploys from *The Demagogue's Playbook*

To achieve the desirable state of dramatically improving the general welfare of the American people, we need to unite against the scheming politicians who are benefiting so outlandishly, irresponsibly, unethically, unsustainably and immorally by engaging in harmful divide-to-conquer strategies. Bottom line, they are betraying the public trust and sacrificing the common good for the inimical purpose of dominating and controlling people.

We see how calamitous it has been for us to let leaders grab control who fail to demonstrate more honest and honorable concern for their citizens and the world, and our communities and societies and cultures -- and the environmental commons that sustains us.

We see how negative the impacts are of having "leaders" who indulge in generously rewarded influence peddling, and who oppose reforms and common sense progress, and who facilitate public corruption and abuse authority, and who congenitally lie to us and evade every effort made to hold them accountable.

It is particularly irksome that "conservative" leaders exert so much control through a long litany of illegitimate and dishonest means, and that they dangerously indulge in cult-follower-enabled fear-mongering rabble-rousing

demagoguery. Disturbingly, such cunning leaders emotionally hijack their duped followers, who are too easily swayed by self-serving untruths and persuasive propaganda and the promulgation of manipulative misinformation and dastardly divisive disinformation. And they act as Trojan Horse traitors against the vast majority of Americans in their zeal to pander to the rich, and to cling desperately to power.

We are seeing how pathological the success of fomented division turns out to be, with its incited polarization and agitated partisan rancor. And when those who benefit from division start inciting violence instead of striving to cooperatively solve the big problems we face, they upset domestic tranquility -- in effect torpedoing social cohesion and the great Golden Rule principle of treating others fairly and seeking to coexist peaceably.

The American people would be much better off if our representatives demonstrated integrity by investing in desirable greater good goals, and ignored the bullhorns of the treacherous abusers of power who demand that they be allowed to continue to maintain their onerous monopoly on domineering political influence.

Let's choose our national policies and priorities in accordance with the smart precept that we invest in common sense progressive principles. For instance:

(1) Invest in the *Common Good, Properly Understood* -- "good citizen goals" -- rather than in expanded special privileges for the few. Help prevent power being usurped and abused by minority factions.

(2) Provide more generous funding for programs that improve the general welfare, instead of using public debt to finance big Tax Cut giveaways to the top dogs. The 2017 Republican Tax Cuts will expire at the end of 2025, and renewing them would cost trillions of dollars. This is a swindle, and every penny of benefit given to those in the top 1% should be reversed, for they have already been making out like bandits for decades from taxpayer-financed tax cuts on top levels of income that were enacted by Republicans under Reagan and George W. Bush.

(3) Dedicate our nation to social justice rather than increased inequalities and the defense of the domination of our government by industry. We should simultaneously take steps to dramatically reduce the overwhelming influence of white males in both government and Big Business.

(4) Invest in a rapid transition to an increasing use of renewable energy sources, rather than costly indulgences in continuing to burn fossil fuels that are destabilizing the global climate. We should stop allowing corporations to increase private profits by abusing influence to get "conservative" politicians to allow them to externalize costs onto the public. The most sensible and sustainable course of action is to invest in clean energy rather than stimulating fossil fuel use through perverse incentives and subsidies. At the same time, we should take stronger steps to protect public lands and the environmental commons.

One powerful way to tackle the climate crisis would be to end the flow of money to fossil fuel development. Just since the Paris Agreement in December 2015, the world's 60 biggest banks have put almost \$7 trillion of financing into fossil fuel companies. A bill in Congress, the Fossil Free Finance Act, would require the Federal Reserve to use its power and exercise its responsibility to make big banks align their financing with science-based emissions targets and obligations under the Paris Agreement. Demand that it be enacted!

(5) Reform our economic system and strengthen our democracy to create greater democratic fairness, and reject policies and priorities that discriminate against women, people in racial minorities and the poor.

(6) Improve public education rather than subsidizing private schools for the fortunate. Young people are being treated unacceptably shabbily by our "conservative" leaders, so give greater priority to THEIR best interests.

(7) Seek and ratify peace initiatives rather than spending such a god-awful amount on poorly controlled military expenditures every year.

(8) Strengthen voting rights and pass criminal justice reform to fix the entrenched status quo of harsh drug laws and systemic racism that persists in our *Incarceration Nation*.

(9) Protect *Roe vs. Wade* reproductive rights rather than allowing evangelical conservatives to deprive women of their rights to decide whether or not to carry a fertilized egg for nine months, no matter how begotten.

Good Leadership Requires Good Personnel

This is a truism: "personnel is policy". The choice of who is to lead us in the White House importantly involves who is to fill Cabinet positions, and there is a vital importance to appointing people who work -- and think -- in the public interest. Bear this in mind when voting!

A cogent example of contrasting choices involves who is appointed to be the Attorney General. For instance, compare the steady and responsible efforts being made by Joe Biden's respectable Attorney General Merrick Garland to the partisan wrongdoing of Trump's last Attorney General Bill Barr. The Salt Lake Tribune political cartoonist Pat Bagley made clear where Bill Barr stood in his political cartoon "Bill Barr Consigliere", which depicted Barr shamefacedly stating, "IT IS MY DUTY TO PROTECT DONALD TRUMP FROM ACCUSATIONS OF FRAUD, PERJURY, GRAFT, RAPE, RACKETEERING, GROPING, WITNESS TAMPERING, TAX DODGING, INSIDER TRADING, OBSTRUCTION OF JUSTICE, DEFAMATION, HIGH CRIMES AND MISDEMEANORS, EXTORTION, CRIMINAL CONSPIRACY, BREACHES OF CONTRACT, EMOLUMENTS VIOLATIONS, NEPOTISM, HATCH ACT VIOLATIONS, TREASON ...".

Bill Barr obviously operated more like Trump's scheming personal lawyer than serving the public interest. In contrast, Joe Biden's Attorney General Merrick Garland gave measured remarks from the Department of Justice to mark the first anniversary of the January 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol. While discussing the prosecution of those responsible for the mob riot assault, Garland said, "The actions we have taken thus far will not be our last. The Justice Department remains committed to holding all January 6 perpetrators at any level accountable under law, whether they were present that day, or were otherwise criminally responsible." He also addressed the rise in violence and threats of violence seen across the country, as well as the importance in protecting the right to vote. In fact, there is an ethical code of conduct in the Code of Federal Regulations that requires all government employees to be loyal "to the highest moral principles and to country". See the *Fourteen Principles of Ethical Conduct for Federal Employees* to understand what ethical service should require.

Do not vote for Republicans, because their Project 2025 would eviscerate expertise by getting rid of career civil servants and replacing them with Trump loyalists.

The Corporate Triumph over Working People

Donald Trump is a con man. He told voters he would 'protect' and 'fight for' workers, but once in power he only made weak pretenses of doing so. Instead, his administration systematically did the opposite. The pandemic provided the administration another opportunity to continue its attacks on workers' rights. Rather than fairly instituting policies to protect the nation's "essential workers", the administration remained largely silent on workplace safety standards, and refused to issue new ones or even enforce the old ones to protect workers against terrible threats posed by the contagious coronavirus. Doctors, nurses and caregivers have been especially harshly affected, along with farm workers and people who work in meat-processing plants.

A report from the Economic Policy Institute, a nonprofit and nonpartisan think tank, provided a review of the Trump administration's 50 most egregious attacks on working people. This analysis revealed that Trump's chaotic tenure was marked by a clear commitment to advancing a pro-corporate and anti-worker agenda. These 50 ways that Trump and his administration and Republicans in Congress worked against the best interests of workers included engaging in persistent efforts to take away health care from tens of millions of workers, failing to act to protect the health of workers on the job during the pandemic, trying to prevent increases in minimum wages, preventing millions of workers from receiving overtime pay, proposing a rule that would lower the earnings of tipped workers, and issuing guidance that allowed states to deny unemployment insurance benefits to workers who refused to return to unsafe jobs. Trump temporarily suspended funding for Social Security, and opposed adequate fiscal stimulus during the pandemic, and excluded millions of workers from paid leave provisions in the 2020 Families First Coronavirus Relief Act (including 9 million health care workers and more than 4 million first responders). And Republican Senators rammed through appointments of numerous anti-labor judges onto federal courts, and made it a top priority to satisfy the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's anti-worker wish list and its lobbying efforts to weaken the ability of employees to organize with co-workers to bargain collectively for better pay and benefits from their employers.

The Trump administration also persisted in attempts to end protections for Dreamers, and it suspended the

issuance of green cards, pushed to lower wages for migrant farm workers, and obstructed workers' right to fair union elections. It also reduced workplace safety inspections, allowed the misclassification of gig workers to deprive them of paid benefits, repealed a requirement that employers report workplace injuries and illnesses, and reduced collective bargaining rights of federal workers. And all too often, it continued to encourage the offshoring of jobs to lower wage countries that have fewer labor protections and environmental safeguards.

Trump gave angry American workers a misleading prescription for how to fix the loss of manufacturing jobs, for most of them have been lost to computers and machines, not people in countries like Mexico and China. It is noteworthy that American manufacturers produce twice as much as they did in 1984, but with one-third fewer workers, according to Thomas Friedman. Trump declared we should build walls and increase trade barriers, in addition to giving huge tax breaks to the rich, but Thomas Friedman expressed a convincing opinion about a much better course of action during the first year of the pandemic: "The smartest thing we can do now is to keep our economy as open and flexible as possible -- to get the change signals first and be able to quickly adapt; create the opportunity for every American to engage in lifelong learning, because whatever jobs emerge will require more knowledge; make sure that learning stresses as much of the humanities and human interactive skills as hard sciences; make sure we have an immigration policy that continues to attract the world's most imaginative risk-takers; and strengthen our safety nets, because this era will leave more people behind."

Abraham Lincoln once purportedly stated (possibly attributed apocryphally): "... I see in the near future a crisis approaching that unnerves me and causes me to tremble for the safety of my country. As a result of the (Civil) war, corporations have been enthroned and an era of corruption in high places will follow, and the money power of the country will endeavor to prolong its reign by working upon the prejudices of the people until the wealth is aggregated in a few hands, and the Republic is destroyed." It is our shared responsibility to come together to reject today's MAGA Republican efforts that strengthen corrupting corporate power.

Candidate Trump promised to fix the "rigged system" and "drain the swamp" in Washington D.C., but once in office it turned out that this promise was one of the biggest political bait-and-switch schemes that has ever been perpetrated. Not only did he fill his Cabinet with billionaire donors, Wall Street bankers, corporate CEOs, unqualified partisans, treacherous schemers and extreme right-wing conservatives, but his agenda in many ways represented a double-cross of his rural white supporters. Instead of standing up for the health, well-being and best interests of those supporters and the vast majority of the American people, Republicans gave huge debt-financed tax cuts to corporations and rich people, and rolled back remedial Wall Street reforms. And they undermined the healthcare system, unsuccessfully sued in the Supreme Court to end Affordable Care, and attacked consumer rights and collective bargaining rights of working people. And they acted to gut regulations that protect clean fresh water supplies and the atmosphere, and public lands and the global climate.

This is a disastrously sad state of affairs, and a pathetic testament to the betrayal of the American people by 'conservatives' on tax issues that egregiously favor the rich, and on trade deals that primarily promote the interests of multinational corporations at the expense of the majority of the people. The overheated pressure cooker of social unrest could easily be made much less dangerous by turning down the heat under the simmering pot of injustices and discord. Instead, we should seek common ground in relatively small investments in equitable social insurance policies like higher minimum wages, improved public education, truer national security, and greater domestic tranquility. To finance these social goods, a more steeply graduated tax structure is needed.

A main reason that the American people have not been able to unite over common good goals is that conservative politicians have been "doing whatever it takes to win" in recent years, as if any means whatsoever are justified to accomplish self-centered narrow ends. Professor Robert Reich analyzed the exceedingly high cost of this prevailing ethos in the U.S. in an October 2016 article *The High Price of Winning at Any Cost*.

Reich pointed out that two observers from the Brookings Institution and the American Enterprise Institute trace the beginning of this divisive hyperpolarized scorched-earth strategy to Newt Gingrich back when he was Speaker of the House in 1995. The Republican Party under Gingrich became "ideologically extreme, scornful of compromise, dismissive of the legitimacy of its political opposition and unmoved by conventional understandings of facts, evidence and science." This stance betrayed the public's trust in government and decimated hopes for good

governance. Corporate leaders, too, have pursued consequentially harmful courses of action in order to gain benefits at the public expense. They have been able to continue doing so thanks to laissez-faire politicians.

These trends have gotten much worse over the years, creating a "vicious cycle of public distrust," wrote Professor Reich. "Leadership of our nation's major institutions is not just about winning. It's also about making these institutions stronger and more trustworthy." It time for us to work together to actualize common good goals and reject the powerful divisive forces that keep us from achieving such auspicious priorities. We need stronger and more trustworthy institutions! Instead, the dangerous and extremely detrimental influence of Trump Republicans has wielded dominating minority influence, enabled by Mitch McConnell and his corrupt cabal of Republican U.S. Senators. This has made a tragic travesty of civil discourse, honesty, rational thinking and fair-mindedness. And when it comes to grace in conceding to having become a big loser in the 2020 election, Trump has shown himself to be one of the worst and most treacherous losers ever. This is a titanic failing.

Conservatives Without Conscience

John Dean, the White House Counsel under Republican president Richard Nixon, penned a scathing portrayal in 2006 of the authoritarian impulses of conservatives in his book *Conservatives Without Conscience*. Dean provided illumination by examining the conservative movement's inner circle of leaders at the time, along with its policies and mind-set. He identified the movement as being fundamentally authoritarian, and pointed out abuses of power, and emphasized "the striking authoritarian character of contemporary conservative beliefs, attitudes and prejudices, and how these are expressed in policy and practice." He also conveyed a revealing portrait of leaders who do not honor "the founding principles of liberty and equality, and who cloak their actions in moral superiority while pushing the country further and further from its constitutional foundations."

Dean asserted that conservatism has been co-opted by people with authoritarian personalities and plans, and cited the perspectives of scholar Bob Altemeyer. "According to Dean, modern conservatism, specifically in the Christian Right, embraces obedience, inequality, intolerance and strong intrusive government." This stance stands in stark contrast to the philosophies and policies advocated by conservative politicians like Barry Goldwater, who was John Dean's personal role model. "Using Altemeyer's scholarly work, he contends that there is a tendency toward ethically questionable political practices when authoritarians are placed in positions of power, and that the current (in 2006) political situation is dangerously unsound because of it."

"Dean cites the behavior of key members of the Republican leadership, including George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, Tom DeLay, Newt Gingrich and Bill Frist as clear evidence of a relationship between modern right-wing conservatism and this authoritarian approach to governance. He places particular emphasis on the abdication of checks and balances by the Republican Congress, and of the dishonesty of the conservative intellectual class in support of the GOP, as a result of the obedience and arrogance innate to the authoritarian mentality."

"Regrettably, empirical studies reveal that authoritarians are frequently enemies of freedom, anti-democratic, anti-equality, highly prejudiced, mean-spirited, power hungry, Machiavellian, and amoral."

The right-wing agenda makes it clear that freedom is a fragile thing, and that demagoguery, dishonesty and misrule are threats to our personal liberties, security and overall well-being. John Dean's understandings in *Conservatives Without Conscience* were extraordinarily prescient in light of the rise of Trump and Trumpism.

In 2007, John Dean wrote *Broken Government: How Republican Rule Destroyed the Legislative, Executive and Judicial Branches*. In this book, Dean built on *Conservatives Without Conscience* to argue that the Republican Party has gravely damaged all three branches of the federal government in service of ideological rigidity, with little regard given to the public interest or the general good. John Dean concluded that conservatism must regenerate itself to remain true to its core ideals of limited government and respect for the rule of law.

One of the most egregious instances of activities that conservatives without conscience engage in is the brainwashing of millions of Americans into believing trickle-down economic ideologies that serve to concentrate wealth into the hands of the few, at the expense of the many. This undermines the general welfare and proves to be contrary to the common good and the fundamental tenets of democracy itself.

John F. Kennedy made an incisive observation about public opinion: "For the great enemy of truth is very often not

the lie -- deliberate, contrived and dishonest -- but the myth -- persistent, persuasive, and unrealistic. Too often we hold fast to the clichés of our forebears. We subject all facts to a prefabricated set of interpretations. *We enjoy the comfort of opinion without the discomfort of thought.*"

After four long and terribly chaotic years, Trump was finally removed from office, and he has narcissistically refused to concede, making baseless claims of widespread voter fraud and attacking the integrity of our elections. Republican efforts to maintain their monopoly on power are being thwarted, and criminal acts are being investigated. One of Trump's most brazen efforts to undermine democracy was to claim that voting my mail is rife with fraud (it is not), and to insist on the baseless idea that the 2020 election was stolen from him.

It was a sad state of affairs to have progress and reform be stymied by an intransigent U.S. Senate ruled by Mitch McConnell, when he was Majority Leader from January 2015 through January 2021. He was the self-proclaimed "grim reaper" of progressive legislation. For this reason, I appealed to voters in Georgia to elect Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff in the January 5, 2021 runoff elections, and was gratified that voters succeeded in this consequential effort. In all future elections, I urge voters to likewise choose the more honest, honorable, fair-minded and progressive candidates. We certainly need better guidance and governance.

What we need is a "political revolution" that favors the 99% of Americans. What we got with the Trump regime was a reactionary political revolution that drastically exacerbated inequalities and made injustices dangerously worse. The politicians that foisted this revolting state of affairs on our country often recite a mantra of "jobs, jobs, jobs", but they use a range of deceitful schemes to gain power and abuse it. They succeed by preying on the fears, insecurities, grievances and resentments of a large swath of the people, without offering truly beneficial policy proposals, plans, initiatives or remedial legislation.

Most revolutions are not caused by revolutionaries, but by stupidity and brutality of rulers. P.J. O'Rourke once provocatively stated: "Authority has always attracted the lowest elements in the human race. All through history mankind has been bullied by scum. Those who lord it over their fellows and toss commands in every direction and would boss the grass in the meadows about which way to bend in the wind are the most depraved kind of prostitutes. They submit to any indignity, perform any vile act, do anything to achieve power."

Betrayals

Poet, writer and civil rights activist Maya Angelou famously once wrote, "When someone shows you who they are, believe them the first time."

Here are truths I find to be all but self evident. MAGA Republicans have become violators of the public trust, the common good and democracy itself. How are they doing this?

They betray *Core Values of Democracy* by putting public health and safety far below their political interests in grabbing power and wielding ruthless control over the lives, fortunes and well-being of the people.

They betray the American people by corrupting government to favor rich people over poor people, and capitalists over workers; they sabotage "power to the people" by giving determinative influence to corporations.

They betray the *Common Good, Properly Understood* by pushing an agenda that is detrimental to the vast majority of people alive today. This agenda is also pathologically harmful to all to be born in future generations.

They betray almost everyone everywhere by siding with fossil fuel industries and obstructing sensible efforts to prevent the destabilization of the global climate.

They undermine the health and sustainability of the environmental commons by facilitating assaults against the natural world, and against balance in natural ecosystems, and against the biological diversity of life on Earth.

Republicans betray the people by putting Party over Country, and personal political advantages over their oaths to the Constitution. They do this in their stands for ever-expanding rich privilege, and in their persistent attempts to block reforms designed to achieve democratic fairness, social justice, fiscal responsibility, social cohesion, and truer and more expansive and inclusive liberties. And it is a betrayal of our democracy to show blind loyalty to Trump and his lies about the 2020 election having been stolen from him.

Republicans forsake the American people by abandoning moderation and embracing a lunatic fringe, shamefully claiming that the MAGA mob that attacked the Capitol were engaging in "legitimate political discourse". Videos prove otherwise. They lie when they deny the insurrection was planned or incited, or when they claim it was led by "antifa" rather than a radicalized mob of Oath Keepers, Proud Boys and other white supremacists, Neo Nazis, QAnon zealots and other saboteurs of democracy. NONE of the more than 1,200 rioters who have been charged for their roles in the riot were antifa.

They and their divisive co-conspirators on Fox News weaponize lies, deceit and false conspiracy disinformation, and twist the truth by acting as emotion-hijacking rabble rousers against Democrats, progressives, liberals, women, people of color, immigrants, reformers, corruption fighters and disenfranchised people.

Republicans betray the majority of Americans by giving debt-financed tax cuts mainly to the already wealthy, even though in doing so they unfairly obligate every taxpayer in every future year to pay for this generosity. They betray the people by persistently telling monumentally Big Lies about prosperity trickling down, claiming they are trying to improve the general welfare while they mortgage and diminish the future. They act fiscally irresponsibly in this mortgaging national debt swindle that gives gargantuan benefits to the rich and wrongly drives an increasing concentration of money and power in the hands of the few.

They betray liberty and justice for all by broadly discriminating against women and Blacks and Latinos, and by perpetuating white male supremacy and systemic racism against people of color. They defend structural gender discrimination that broadly disadvantages females. (Codify Roe v. Wade into law!) Black lives sure don't matter as much as white lives, the way things are, and fair steps should be taken to redress this pathetic situation.

They betray fairly representative government by restricting voting, engaging in discriminatory racist voter suppression, and gerrymandering. They tried to sabotage the U.S. Postal Service in 2020 to slow voting-by-mail. They spread disinformation and used partisan dirty tricks in their cunning attempts to persuade tens of millions of Americans that their agenda is best, even though it perpetuates the rigging of the economy in favor of corporations and profiteers, contrary to the best interests of working people and the common good. By obstructing democratic fairness, they undermine equality, hinder expansive inclusivity, torpedo egalitarian values, and prevent more equitable national policies and priorities.

They gain power by dividing people, instead of trying to unite them in common cause. Some of their main strategies are to scapegoat immigrants, betray Dreamers and treat refugees cruelly. The Trump administration even separated children from their parents in horrendous border camps, and used this unconscionable treatment (and scandalous efforts to hide it) to divert attention and blame from the negative outcomes of their malfeasance, incompetence and pandemic turpitude.

Republicans undermine the greater good by engaging in corrupt Big Money campaign financing and pay-to-play politics. In buying and selling influence, Republicans have deeply corrupted both federal and state governments. It was the Supreme Court's *Citizens United* ruling in January 2010 that helped facilitate Big Money abuses of power, and we should understand the incisive dissent expressed by Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens from that wrongly decided system-corrupting decision: "A democracy cannot function effectively when its constituent members believe laws are being bought and sold." The same is true when citizens see Republicans stack the Supreme Court and federal appeals courts with politically partisan judges who are conniving knee-jerk "conservatives" that often disregard the general well-being of the majority in the rulings they make.

Republicans betray the people by having fooled a large proportion of the populace to enable them to grab power, and then acting to dominate the people by imposing their exclusionary narrow-minded control over them.

Republicans betray Main Street businesses in their zeal to give greater advantages to Wall Street interests, and they work against good governance and honest accountability.

And they betrayed our allies in democratic countries like Germany, France and Scandinavian countries when they let Trump demonstrate allegiance to an axis of power-abusing authoritarian leaders that included Vladimir Putin in Russia, Mohammed bin Salman in Saudi Arabia, Recep Erdogan in Turkey and Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil.

Nonetheless, Good Hope Persists

Hope lies in honorable patriotic allegiance to the great values set forth in the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution -- striving for unity, establishing justice, insuring domestic tranquility, providing for the national defense, promoting the general welfare, and securing blessings of liberty to ourselves and those in posterity.

In the context of values crucial to civilized society, right-wing conservatism is wrong. The moral good is essentially those things that are consistent with the common good and the greater good of the group. Rashly reactionary doctrinaire conservatives generally side with economic elitists, and are anti-democratic in favoring the few over the many. An unfortunate adjunct aspect of this concocted extreme of unfairness is that they champion policies that are authoritarian and oppressive in order to keep the many in their subjugated place.

P.J. O'Rourke once wrote: "The Republicans are the party that says government doesn't work and then they get elected and prove it." He made this satirical statement in the 1990s, and today it is clear that Republicans pose a much bigger threat to democracy and overall well-being than merely a group who proves government does not work. They cannot be allowed to impose their despotic Project 2025 plans on *We the People!*

They prove how susceptible our 248-year-old democracy is to political extremism, demagoguery, despotism and corruption. Our Founding Fathers warned that eternal vigilance is needed to keep our democratic republic safe from tyranny. So what has become of us? Distracted by our devices and overwhelming overloads of polarizing propaganda, pervasive advertising, and misinformation on social media -- and deceived by profiteers and coldly calculating demagogues -- we dumbly allowed a civilian coup to take place right under our noses. Millions of Americans have died defending our country from threats from abroad, and yet insidious subversion from within allowed a group of scheming swindlers in the Trump regime to grab power and flagrantly abuse it by imposing an unethical, dishonorable and extremely inequitable agenda on the people. This cruel agenda contributed to the sacrifice of "essential workers" and countless thousands of Americans who have died as a result of the shrewd politicizing of prophylactic and precautionary health measures during the pandemic.

Truly,

Tiffany B. Twain

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