Common Sense Revival

Book One of the Earth Manifesto

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The Earth Manifesto: Saving the World through Sensible Ideas!

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DEDICATION:

This *Common Sense Revival* is dedicated to:

- Thomas Paine, for his Revolutionary commitment to fair representation of the people.
- Alexander Von Humboldt, the eminently admirable ecological visionary and almost forgotten father of environmentalism who was an inspirational naturalist, world traveling adventurer and intrepid explorer, and the most famous scientist of his age (he lived from 1769 to 1859).
- Abraham Lincoln, for his bold recognition of the vital importance of good governance of the people, by the people, and for the people.

- Mark Twain, for his insightful humor, drawling lecture style, serious commitment to peace and social fairness during the Gilded Age, and his penchant for exposing misguided political and religious doctrines.

Mark Twain, for his insightful humor, drawling lecture style, serious commitment to peace and social fairness during the Gilded Age, and his penchant for exposing misguided political and religious doctrines.

- The Dalai Lama, for his simple wisdom and understanding that a unity of the heart and the head is vital for our individual and collective well-being.
- Barry Commoner, for his ecological visions and realizations about the Four Laws of Ecology and the Three E's of environmental concern.

Common Sense Revival - Book One of the Earth Manifesto

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Here are the titles of the Twelve Books of the Earth Manifesto. To review the Table of Contents pages for each of these twelve books, see the link on the Home Page that immediately precedes Part One. All Twelve Books are available right now from the on-demand publisher Lulu Press.

Common Sense Revival	Book One of the Earth Manifesto
Entertaining Illumination Unleashed	Book Two of the Earth Manifesto
Existential Enlightenment (Version 1)	Book Three of the Earth Manifesto
Love in the Time of Choleric (version 2)	Book Three of the Earth Manifesto
Imaginative Perspectives and Ecopsychological Insights	Book Four of the Earth Manifesto
Healthy Recipes and Provocative Worldviews	Book Five of the Earth Manifesto
Incisive Global Perspectives	Book Six of the Earth Manifesto
Comprehensive Global Perspective: An Illuminating Worldview	Book Seven of the Earth Manifesto
Big Picture Perspectives, and A Pursuit of Social Activism	Book Eight of the Earth Manifesto
The Original Earth Manifesto	Book Nine of the Earth Manifesto
A Marvelous Miscellany of Musings and Evolutionary Understandings	Book Ten of the Earth Manifesto
The Rather Ridiculous Ruses that Fuel Revolutionary Unrest	Book Eleven of the Earth Manifesto
See Clearly – Sanity During Insane Times	Book Twelve of the Earth Manifesto

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION:

I invite readers to send me Wikipedia-like modifications with good ideas or editorial suggestions for improving the tone, content, accuracy or comprehensive nature of the perspectives in this manifesto. Tiffany Twain, like a busy beaver, will incorporate all ideas that are truly bigger or more accurate, balanced or convincing.
Contact at: SaveTruffulaTrees@hotmail.com

Truly,
Dr. Tiffany B. Twain
Doctor of Philosophy and imagined philosophic soul mate and valiantly illegitimate great-granddaughter of the highly esteemed and irreverent writer, lecturer, humorist and philosopher Mark Twain.

Introduction to Common Sense Revival

In the beginning, everything that human beings ate came from the wild. Throughout almost the entire span of our species' existence, our ancestors gained sustenance by hunting animals and gathering plants and fruits, nuts, eggs, shellfish and other wild things to eatj source of wild food remaining: fish and shellfish from the sea. And it turns out that we are exploiting wild fisheries at a completely unsustainable rate. This fact makes it vitally important for us to consider the serious implications of this unwise course of action, and to act accordingly.

An old Chinese Proverb says, "Give a man a fish, and he will eat for a day. Teach him how to fish, and he will eat for a lifetime." There is great wisdom in this understanding, but it is becoming increasingly obvious that when there are too many fishermen, overfishing can deplete fish stocks and lead to risks of fishery collapse. In addition, pollution and toxins and physical damages to fisheries are harming life in aquatic ecosystems. The sustainability of wild fisheries is being further threatened by an increasing acidification of Earth's oceans, which is being caused by the burning of fossil fuels and wanton logging worldwide, and an accompanying harm-causing build-up of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. It would be a much better plan for humanity to agree to sensibly protect wild fisheries to ensure there will be wild fish for fellow humans long into the future.

It is, all considered, a huge global challenge to reconcile voracious human needs, desires and profit compulsions with sustainable fishing practices. The United Nations estimates that fishing fleets in the world are twice as large as the oceans can sustain. The total harvest of wild fish, shellfish and aquatic plants has increased by about 500% since 1950. Aquaculture production -- "the farming of aquatic organisms" -- has increased from a negligible amount in 1950 to almost as much as the total harvest from wild fisheries, while wild capture has plateaued since the late 1990s. Aquaculture is unfortunately fraught with many environmental problems and significant risks. Marine biologists and ecologists say we should establish no-catch areas and ocean preserves to protect key wild fish breeding grounds and nursery habitats in oceans, estuaries, mangrove swamps, wetlands and rivers, but not enough nations are taking such eminently reasonable measures. This has "tragedy of the commons" outcomes.

I make a soft, sibilant sound that is generally effective in attracting the immediate attention of any nearby dogs. It is beginning to appear that the ecologist Garrett Hardin may have been right when he somewhat cynically asserted: "Natural selection favors the forces of psychological denial." When individuals and businesses deny facts about damages to common resources, they can gain narrow self-interested benefits in the short term by exploiting these resources with excessive heedlessness. Those who deny how undesirable it is to rapidly deplete natural resources, or how high the mounting costs will be due to climate disruptions, can likewise gain short-term advantages, but these gains are undesirably realized at the expense of humanity and the biosphere as a whole.

In a larger sense, we have been collectively denying the staggering scope of our aggregate harmful impacts on natural systems as our human numbers have more than tripled in the past 75 years. This is true mainly because so many people have been eager to ignore inherent resource limits and vulnerabilities to damages in natural processes. "Ruin is the destination toward which all men rush, each pursuing his own best interest in a society that believes in the freedom of the commons," wrote Professor Garrett Hardin in 1968. He compellingly added, "Education can counteract the natural tendency to do the wrong thing …".

Let's educate ourselves! Biotic conditions on Earth have been deteriorating as the number of human beings alive continues to inexorably increase. It would be smart for us to respect the conclusions reached in the Millennium

Ecosystem Assessment, a study completed in 2005 by more than 1,200 scientists in 95 countries who had spent four years compiling their findings. These experts reported that human beings are consuming natural resources at an unsustainable rate, and that we are simultaneously causing the degradation of ecosystems upon which we depend. This double whammy is diminishing the carrying capacity of Earth for many species of life, ominously including our own. We see that this is NOT good!

The issue of the sustainable use of fisheries is just one aspect of a larger and even more daunting dilemma of how humankind can manage to feed growing masses of people as increasing human needs and expanding wants collide with declining reserves of natural resources and compromised ecosystems and excessive emissions of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. We stand here, arms akimbo, relaxed yet intently attentive, objectively surveying the scene at this crucial juncture in history, and this Common Sense Revival providentially proposes a variety of good solutions to these unprecedented global challenges.

Buddha advised people to do no harm, and to practice restraint according to fundamental precepts, suggesting we should engage in good conduct, and eat moderately, and devote ourselves to becoming more aware and enlightened. A silent Yay! for such wise perspectives. Let us meditate.

Creative Visions Materialize in the Interstices of Our Minds

Dr. Sylvia Earle, "Her Deepness", is one of America's foremost oceanographers, and an outspoken advocate for courageous and farsighted commitments to giving expanded protections to Earth's oceans. As related in the telling story told in the documentary film *Mission Blue,* with its boldly beautiful cinematography, Dr. Earle has spent more time beneath the surface of seas than almost anyone else ever, so she has seen the devastating effects of increasing human predations there. She has witnessed firsthand the overfishing, the slaughtering of marine animals, the Texas-sized Great Pacific Garbage Patch, and the heedless damages associated with grotesquely wasteful fishing practices and collateral adversities being caused by human activities.

Dr. Earle was the winner of the TED Prize in 2009. This recognition included a $1 million grant that is given each year to an extraordinary individual who has a creative vision to spark positive global change. Her proposal was to "use all means at your disposal -- films! expeditions! the Web! new submarines! -- to create a campaign to ignite public support for a global network of marine protected areas -- << Hope Spots >> -- that are large enough to save and restore the blue heart of the planet." A salubrious idea! Let's all support this goal.

Anyone who has had the extraordinary experience of snorkeling in the luminous and brilliantly colorful undersea world of coral reef communities that teem with a marvelous symbiotic profusion of living things will appreciate the depth of tragedy unfolding in marine ecosystems. Try this: Visualize night-feeding "feather animal" brain corals and inquisitive parrotfish, and dainty damselfish and spiny sea urchins, and crusty crustaceans and many other species of life that live in healthy undersea ecosystems. As human activities contribute to an increasing concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, the slightly alkaline ocean water is absorbing more of this acid-forming gas, and the resulting "ocean acidification" is disrupting coral reef ecosystems and threatening many species of marine life with eternal extinction. In terms of a great variety of life forms, coral reefs are like rainforests of the seas, and corals as a group are nearly as threatened as amphibians, the most endangered group of species in terrestrial habitats. Amphibians and corals are indicator species, which are like canaries in coal mines that are dropping dead, and this development should serve as a warning of hazardous changes in conditions crucial to the survival of the coal miners themselves. That, in effect, is all of us!

Political Cartoon: A man and woman are standing at a movie theater entrance, remarking on a poster sign:

NOW PLAYING

"Tragedy of the Commons"

And the man is saying, with a droll look, "I hear it lacks dialogue ..." (Mental note: we need better dialogue!)

Findings from a May 2019 United Nations report indicated that human activities are driving an estimated one million animal and plant species toward extinction at a rate never before experienced in human history, causing a "sixth mass extinction event", the latest in the span of the last 500 million years. I imagine a loud bell ringing out every time another species of life goes extinct, for this loss of biological diversity sends us a ctitical

message: "For whom does the bell toll? It tolls for thee." (That's every one of us in the future!)

We are experiencing *Years of Living Dangerously,* and this should put us on high alert, willing to take courageous action. Bravo in this context for Pope Francis for having expressed sensible ideas in his 2015 encyclical on climate change. Climate can be an angry beast, and it is dangerous folly to recklessly poke it. Greenhouse gases trap heat energy from the sun, destabilizing climatic conditions, so we should honor precautionary principles and reduce emissions of carbon dioxide and methane. I once wondered whether destructive Hurricane Sandy in October 2012 was some sort of sign from God that showed His displeasure with humankind. "Or the torrential '1,000-year rains' in the Louisiana Flood of August 2016, or the apocalyptic hurricanes in Texas, Florida and the Caribbean of 2017, or the destructive wildfires every year in the Western USA?" Or the terrible tornados that struck the Midwest in December 2021, or the extremely costly and destructive Hurricane Ian that struck Florida at the end of September 2022. Or were these events merely Mother impersonally demonstrating Her true character? Mom Nature no doubt has some real impressive feats to spring upon us as time lapses relentlessly into a turbulent future. The best means to pacify Mother Nature would be to cultivate better understandings of her natural workings, and to work *with her,* not *against her.* Proponents of *Natural Capitalism* urge us to recognize the essential relationship that exists between Earth's living systems and crucially valuable natural resources, and to seek fairer outcomes in the activities and behaviors that are a basis of human capital.

Let these understandings launch a revival of *common sense* realizations, and let them be couched in a context of Big Picture *uncommon good sense*. And let these revelations come now! See the details of understandings that are contained in the Sustainability Index in this Common Sense Revival (on pages 137-148), for they urge us to hear anew, as if for the first time, the insightful truth found in cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead's observation about providentially positive social change: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

It is time for people from all points on the political spectrum to courageously step forward and demand smarter management of common resources. I encourage everyone to join in, to help us collectively begin to do the right things that are consequentially most consistent with the greater good and the prospects of people in the future. To provide guidance in our national decision-making, and to further these salubrious goals, it would be a good plan to adopt a farsighted Bill of Rights for Future Generations, like the one proposed herein (pages 113-122). Nelson Mandela, the great South African leader, would have agreed, for he once pointed out: "There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children."

<u>The Tree of the Awareness of Right and Wrong</u>

Civilizing influences have wrought remarkable changes in human behaviors over many millennia, and the better angels of our nature have made far-reaching inroads against the worser devils of our primal impulses. At the same time, a heartening change has taken place: *Deontological* theories that posit absolute notions of good and evil are beginning to yield to a more relative sense of *ethical consequentialism* in assessing right and wrong.

It is as though the biblical forbidden Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil has gone extinct, with its alluring fruit and large deciduous dualistic Manichean leaves, but before it did so, some of its Garden of Eden relatives evolved into a new species, an evergreen, the majestic Tree of the Awareness of Right and Wrong. The roots of this new species grow deep in the fertile soil of ecological wisdom, the ethics of reciprocity, honorable social intelligence, loving kindness and right understanding.

One realizes, while sitting under the broad canopy of a sacred Tree of the Awareness of Right and Wrong, that the ultimate moral good consists of those things that are most consistent with the greater good of humanity. People see the world in a wide variety of ways, and they hold contrasting and conflicting opinions about big issues, so the best means of assessing the true propriety of any contention or any course of action is by honestly and fairly evaluating the likely impacts and consequences it will have.

I particularly love this idea of right perspective because it happens to coincide with the spiritual wisdom of the Noble Eightfold Path in Buddhist philosophy. This wholesome Middle Way is said to have helped many individuals in a quest for self-awakening, liberation and enlightenment. This ancient Noble Eightfold Path involves Right

Mindfulness, Right View, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Effort, Right Livelihood, Right Concentration and Right Action. This path theoretically can be followed, with scrupulous practice, to develop insight into the true nature of phenomena and reality -- and of ourselves! Buddhists believe that these aspects of wisdom and proper focus and ethical conduct are the best way to transcend delusion, intolerance and greed. These eight facets of the Noble Path are linked together like the spokes of a wheel, and when any one of them is cultivated, they say, it makes the others easier to achieve.

I like this concept! Expanded vision and awareness are practical necessities for us here in the 21st century. This is not merely idealism, and it is true for us both individually and collectively. Achieving a more expansive attunement and competence should be a core mission of education, so that we may improve the prospects of our selves, our communities and our societies, both at home and abroad. Let us enjoy the fine fruit of the Tree of the Awareness of Right and Wrong, and share it with every person, and acknowledge together that the First Commandment of the ultimate human good is to leave a fair legacy to our descendants in future generations.

Overview of Economic Systems

It is provocative to realize that every type of economic system has a specific utility, and that this usefulness can change over time in response to changing needs. Cast aside ideological notions for a moment, and consider this idea closely. The United States had a very effective centrally-planned economy during World War II, which was intently geared up to help us fight and win a war against the militaristic aggression and world domination gambits of Hitler's Germany and Emperor Hirohito's Japan. Then the U.S. had a mixed economy during the Cold War period from 1945 to 1980, when huge public investments were made in rebuilding Europe and constructing a top notch national Interstate Highway system -- and in sending men to the moon, creating social welfare programs like Medicare, and establishing protections of clean water, clean air, wilderness areas, wild and scenic rivers, and endangered species. During this time, tax rates on the highest incomes were 70% or higher, each and every year, salubriously helping finance these important national priorities that served the greater good.

Since 1981, however, the U.S. economy began to be hijacked by moneyed interests that shifted it toward laissez-faire deregulatory plans and tax schemes that give most benefits of the economy to people at the top. This has made the economic system a skewed and flawed utility that foolishly shifts the burden of taxation onto all people in the future by means of the misguided expediency of assessing low tax rates on the highest levels of income, and of financing this generosity by adding the cost to the already riskily gargantuan national debt, which increased from just under $20 trillion in January 2017 to almost $28 trillion during Trump's 4 years in office. It has now exceeds $31 trillion, as of October 2022.

The utility of our economy can be seen to have been corrupted to focus on increasing the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few. This utility comes at very high costs of stoked inequality, reduced social mobility, intensified conflicts, undermined social cohesion, and socially undesirable constraints on investments in common good goals like healthcare for all. It is becoming obvious today that we should now once again shift our economic methods to deal effectively with the daunting challenges that are resulting from this unfair and shortsighted status quo in our wrongly rigged economic and political systems.

Privileged elites profess to value democracy, but in actuality they are stubbornly opposed to true democratic fairness. Privileged powerful people want national priorities that facilitate the concentration of wealth and power in their own hands, so they inimically strive to prevent fairer representation of the people. Noam Chomsky makes this clear in his illuminating and thought-provoking film *Requiem for the American Dream*. He explains in this film the ten main strategies ("10 Principles") that the wealthy use to create a self-reinforcing vicious cycle that helps them gain and maintain a substantial monopoly on wealth. The people of the U.S. are basically faced with choosing to have inequality reduced or allowing authority-abusing factions to further curtail fairness, and through brazen abuses of power by Trump Republicans, inequality has gotten drastically worse, pathetically undermining prospects for a fairer, freer and healthier society.

Surely our leaders should act much more responsibly by making serious reforms to rein in the abuses of influence that result in anti-egalitarian regressive tax cuts, imposed austerity measures, a spiking national debt and foolishly increased allowances for corporations to foist externalized costs onto the people. See the sordid

details of this "Biggest Financial Scam in World History" in my provocative essay *Demagoguery and the Dangers of the Demise of Democracy.*

In Franklin Roosevelt's State of the Union Address in January 1941, he made what has famously become known as his Four Freedoms Speech. In this talk, he articulated what he felt were four fundamental freedoms that people "everywhere in the world" ought to enjoy. They included the freedom of speech, freedom of worship, the freedom from want, and the freedom from fear. Today, with almost 1 billion people living in dire poverty, and an unrestrained global arms race making people everywhere more indebted and less secure, and as demagogic autocratic divisiveness and growing inequality afflicts the world, these Four Freedoms are being broadly abrogated, in many ways. This calls for Right Mindfulness, Right Intention and Right Action!

Revelations

Many Americans want to "blow up" the political status quo, and for good reasons. The establishment deserves the rebuke it was given by people who supported Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump in the primary elections in 2016. Our dominating two party political system has betrayed the American people by allowing our national decision-making to be deeply corrupted by giant corporations that take unfair advantage of our laws to profit excessively on some of the sorry provisions written into international trade agreements, tax law and lax campaign finance rules. We have also been betrayed by moneyed interests that have been grabbing an obscenely large share of the national wealth at the expense of the vast majority of the people. The fact that these schemes have been used to give outlandish benefits and perks to the top 1% has been particularly galling because citizens see that the general welfare of the people is being neglected, and students are being saddled with onerous debt burdens, and social investments are being constrained by austerity measures, and the national debt is skyrocketing, and the criminal justice system continues to be wrongfully unfair.

Our politics and economy have been rigged by those who benefit most from this state of affairs. Some ways they succeed at this is by treacherously dividing people against each other and spewing out misguiding propaganda, denying science and sowing doubt about the best courses of action. And by engaging in strategies that stymie reforms by exploiting identity politics and deviously blaming others. The baleful outcome is that generously-rewarded collaborating politicians and ethics-deficient apologists enable this corruption to continue.

When we realize the reality that a deeply divided and disenfranchised populace is much easier to manipulate and exploit and cheat and oppress than a people united in seeking common good solutions, it is easy to see why our political system has become so polarized. We must soundly reject the agents that are corrupting our politics and perverting our national priorities. It is becoming crystal clear that the American people should rise up in peaceful revolution to demand greater democratic fairness, and to vigilantly protect the freedom of the press and ensure diverse and inclusive voices in the media. We should also demand the guarantee of a more balanced system of justice and a more independent judiciary, not one dominated by politically partisan conservatives.

We Americans will be stronger if we come together in fair-minded common purpose. Let's champion values that are eminently more moral, more socially sane, more spiritually healing, and more environmentally responsible.

Introductory Vision

With these introductory ideas, here is an overview of the master plan for this Common Sense Revival. Thomas Paine and Mark Twain are two of the most renowned characters in American history, and both of these great men provided provocative insights into the most momentous issues of their times. Their perspectives are still valuable when applied to the challenges we face today, so I have adopted some of the understandings of these two self-made eminences in these writings to help illuminate the best ways forward for us to achieve goals consistent with the common good.

Thomas Paine was an Englishman who immigrated to Britain's colonies in North America in 1774 and became one of the most influential voices in favor of American independence and a new form of government that would more fairly represent its citizens. George Washington soberly observed that Thomas Paine's pamphlet *Common Sense* "worked a powerful change in the minds of many men". It did so by igniting popular disaffection with the British

and converting many colonists to a belief in the causes of independence, fairer political representation, expanded liberties and broadened prosperity. Let's clamor more insistently for these causes again today!

Mark Twain was a poor boy from Missouri, born in 1835, who became famous for his entertaining and provocative writing, and for his drawling humor and his deadpan delivery in public talks. By the time he died on April 21, 1910, he plausibly claimed to have become "the most conspicuous person on the planet". His novel story of a teenage boy and an openhearted avuncular black slave who adventurously escape together on a raft drifting down the mighty Mississippi in search of freedom is one of the most simple, surprising, creative, and emotionally evocative tales in all of literature. Mark Twain gave the American people excellent advice when he declared, "Always do the right thing. This will gratify some people and astonish the rest."

This Introduction is intended to serve as a synopsis of the ideas articulated throughout the Twelve Books of the Earth Manifesto. These writings have tended to become less succinct but more inclusive and far-reaching and, I hope, compelling, as time marches inexorably past. Let this Common Sense Revival become an effective launch pad for ideas that, with any poetic justice, will help revolutionarily transform human societies into ones that are significantly fairer and healthier -- and more sustainable for the longer haul.

Big Picture worldviews and farsighted understandings are contained in this collection of essays, and there are also highly specific proposals for ways to improve our country and the world. Incisive insights are conveyed into how we can make our communities healthier, our economies more stable, sound and equitable, and our planet more ecologically flourishing. Propitious ways are proposed for us to begin to more sensibly protect the lands, waters, natural resources and environment that are crucial to our prosperity, general welfare and survival.

This Common Sense Revival is dedicated to the eminently fair idea that the legacy we leave to our heirs in future generations should rightly be one of solid foundations for future well-being and security. We simply cannot continue to build a house-of-cards structure that relies on unsustainably wasteful usages of resources, environmentally destructive business activities and population growth. We should eliminate perverse incentives and strengthen our crisis-prone economic system to mitigate cycles of boom, bust and bailout. We should reform our tax system to make it significantly more progressive, and rein in deficit financing schemes that have made the U.S. national debt the largest in world history.

Let's alter inequality-exacerbating social policies, and unaffordable subsidy and entitlement schemes, and solve egregious healthcare injustices. Let's cut wasteful spending on the military, and reject ideological narrow-mindedness and political extremism. We cannot afford to continue having rancorous divisiveness or so much violence and extensive corruption in our domestic politics, or stoked fears, Trumped up antipathies and provoked anti-neighborly prejudices in international affairs.

Visualize a noble spiritual teacher nodding affirmatively at these words as she meditates under an old banyan tree that resembles the large sacred "awakening tree" -- *Ficus religiosa* -- under which the Buddha is said to have first achieved enlightenment in northern India more than 2,500 years ago. Yay, Buddha!

The proposals and recommendations made throughout these writings would be most effective when supported by a majority of our representatives AND by leaders in most countries around the globe. But since nationalistic and ethnocentric sentiments are powerful in nations worldwide, and because people tend to cherish national sovereignty while opposing any plans that resemble world government, new international agreements between all nations are needed that will promote and safeguard the common good. This is why Albert Einstein was an outspoken proponent of a more international form of cooperative governance that would help prevent wars and assure a more peaceful coexistence between the peoples and countries of the world.

One way we could achieve this and other greater good goals would be by restructuring our societies to make them fairer to all. An integral aspect of this restructuring should be to institute reforms to our systems of campaign financing, and make representative governance fairer. Simultaneously, it would be broadly propitious to take steps to prevent abuses of influence by overly powerful rich people and huge multinational corporations.

<u>Executive Summary</u>

A core idea expressed in these writings is that humankind needs to engage in better stewardship of planet Earth and the ecological health of natural ecosystems. This core idea gives recognition and respect to the fact that farsighted protections of the underpinnings of healthy societies are vitally necessary to ensure an improved general welfare for humanity. In the long run, our aggregate activities simply must be sustainable, whether we proactively choose to achieve this necessary goal, or are forced to it by disastrous developments. To achieve goals that are in harmony with the common good, we need better organization and more intelligently focused priorities, and much more honest and responsible leadership. A main focus of these efforts should be to improve protections of Earth's ecosystems, because they are vitally important to everyone in the future.

Humanity's efforts to achieve dominion over all creatures that creepeth and crawleth have admittedly been astonishingly "successful". In fact, we're reaching a state of Peak Cornucopia, as evidenced by the amazingly providential bounty of things to eat that are available at markets like Whole Foods and CostCo. The fish and shellfish! Yet it is becoming increasingly clear that limits exist, and that our collective best interests are to be found in being more responsible for reducing damages and trying to help restore the health of Earth's biological systems. It will prove to be foolhardy for us to continue exploiting natural resources at the fastest possible rate without giving adequate consideration to depletion, and to needed restoration of ecological health.

A corollary of this core idea that reasonable protections of the environment are indispensible to our well-being is that economic prosperity can be achieved in the long run only if it avoids squandering vital resources and damaging natural habitats. When we rashly cause environmental degradation, we are treating Mother Earth like a business in liquidation. This is a stupid strategy, in stark contrast to acting with more responsible stewardship to ensure that our home planet will continue to resemble a thriving and indefinitely prosperous concern.

The bottom line is that the overall quality of life should be given a higher priority. We can no longer afford to continue putting an overly heavy emphasis on <u>the quantity of goods</u> we can produce and consume. <u>The quality of life</u> for people alive should be regarded as more important than the pursuit of public policies that maximize the advantages of rich people and corporate entities. The quality of life should also be regarded as more important than the quantity of people we can cram onto the planet. If we fail to make life better for the vast majority of people in the world today, and if we are unable to assure the potential well-being of our descendants in the future, we will court catastrophe by unnecessarily exhausting natural resources and irretrievably damaging Earth's providential ecosystems. This outcome would ominously accelerate the rate at which we are driving many species of life toward extinction, rashly increasing the risks to human survival.

NOW is the time for us to choose smarter courses of action that focus on the greater good as a top priority. This is why we need to ratify a Bill of Rights for Future Generations in the U.S. and in nations worldwide, thereby providing clearer guidance in making the right choices for a better future.

One of the great Founding ideals in the United States was the idea that a representative system of government should guarantee people that their general welfare is one of the highest priorities of the Union. Such an auspicious assurance would help ensure that every person would be able to have a fair opportunity to pursue his or her own dreams and happiness and personal sense of security.

Thomas Paine offered a good piece of advice to guide us in improving our societies. He borrowed this wise perspective from Italian author Giacinto Dragonetti, an incisive observer on governments. Giacinto contended long ago in his *Treatise of Virtues and Rewards* that political representatives should "fix the true point of happiness and freedom" by seeking to create "the greatest sum of individual happiness, with the least national expense." An excellent notion!

Let's salute the merits of this idea. It is an important understanding for us today because we have been mortgaging future generations to the hilt, and it is becoming increasingly critical to seek affordable and cost-effective ways to maximize opportunities for the happiness, security and well-being of all Americans. This necessarily means that we should shift the focus of our public policies away from primary efforts to give the richest 1% of Americans an ever-increasing monopoly on the nation's wealth. The honorable, broadly beneficial thing to do is to prevent them from largely dictating our national planning.

As Jacques-Yves Cousteau liked to say, "Let us cease thinking only of ourselves and reasoning only in the short term. Let us assure for the children to come the same rights that have been declared for their parents."

> "Perhaps the sentiments contained in the following pages, are not YET sufficiently fashionable to procure them general favour; a long habit of not thinking a thing WRONG gives it a superficial appearance of being RIGHT, and raises at first a formidable outcry in defense of custom." … "But a long and violent abuse of power is generally the Means of calling the right of it into question …"
>
> --- Thomas Paine in his Introduction to *Common Sense*

A Sticky Idea

Sometimes an idea strikes a resonant chord within us, and develops the quality of "stickiness". Sticky ideas are ones that are generally better understood and remembered than run-of-the-mill conceptions. They achieve this status by relating a good story that is simple, unexpected, concrete, credible and emotionally impactful. The stickier an idea is, the more likely it will be to make people care, and thus to have a lasting impact by actually changing opinions or behaviors. Malcolm Gladwell coined the term "stickiness" in *The Tipping Point,* and Chip and Dan Heath adapted the idea in their illuminating book, *Made to Stick,* emphasizing the importance of clearly identifying core ideas in every attempt to set forth positive plans and transformative messages.

Here is another core idea in this manifesto. It is a simple one that has unexpected implications: There is good cause for hope in the prospects of our species. This hope, naturally, is conditioned upon our collectively doing the right things. We need to make smarter and more ethical choices about how we treat our home planet and its resources, and other people -- especially the most vulnerable and the poor -- and other life on Earth.

H.G. Wells declared back in 1920: "Human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe." Sure enough, sparkling glitters of perceptive understanding are appearing in many places; and so too are many instances of bleak ignorance and dark dangers that seem to be rushing headlong toward us like a surging succession of tsunami waves gathering impetus as they approach the shallower shores of our conscious awareness. Hope does spring eternal, and green shoots of adaptive change can be seen in progressive ideas and developments as diverse as global collaboration on climate initiatives, women's rights protests and open-mindedness. These things provide us with good cause for hope. Hopeful perspectives and optimistic attitudes have a nice added advantage: surprising success in many endeavors is associated with positive attitudes.

Powerful countervailing forces of disinformation, ultra-right ideologies and staunch subversive opposition make it poignantly uncertain what the outcome of this race between understanding and calamity will be. A convincing case can be made that prospects are dim for us to deal adequately with the daunting list of encroaching risks. We are beset by a wide range of serious problems like disease outbreaks, influence-deprived workers, gaping disparities in wealth, corporate malfeasance, adverse impacts of offshoring, political corruption, intensifying stresses, threats of wars and terrorist attacks, worsening extreme weather damages, habitat destruction, resource depletion, species extinctions, air and water pollution, and the degradation of vital ecosystems.

Winston Churchill once observed, "Americans can always be counted on to do the right thing -- after they have exhausted all other possibilities." Surprisingly, many of the problems we face are not insurmountable. Instead, they could actually be solved or mitigated by means of right ideas and understandings, clearer goals, proper priorities, better organization, collaborative decision-making guided by science, sensible financing, creatively adaptive approaches and fairer compromises in choosing more win-win solutions in public policies.

Much has been learned in the past four millennia since alphabets were invented. Exceptionally surprising things have been discovered about the physical world we live in, and about ourselves within it. Human beings have a considerable ability to freely make individual choices, and we seem, in aggregate, to be eminently capable of using our unique human capabilities of foresight to understand clearly and act intelligently. This puts us in a good position to come together to shift our courses of action toward ones that are more propitious to the future well-being of our kind. But clear-eyed understandings are required; and we must overcome the Dividers.

Mission Blue

A colorfully beautiful copy of Hundertwasser's "Save the Seas" poster beams its benediction from the walls of my comfortable abode, as I contemplate the providential good sense contained in the idea that humanity should make expanding commitments to protecting life in the world's oceans. The irony of this artistic rendering of the sensible commandment to Save the Seas suddenly strikes me like a transcendent epiphany. I realize that the seas are currently *saving us* -- not only by providing us with large quantities of fish and shellfish for food, but also by absorbing a significant proportion of the ungodly amounts of greenhouse gases that we have been heedlessly spewing into the atmosphere, as if there will be no tomorrow. (Note: there will be a tomorrow!)

By absorbing large quantities of carbon dioxide, the seas are effectively slowing down a more disastrously rapid onset of climate change impacts on our lives. But in so saving us, the oceans are warming and becoming "more acidic", just as evidence confirms they did during the worst two mass extinction events that ever affected life on Earth in the last 500 million years. These developments in the seas are endangering the biotic richness and diversity of life in the oceans, particularly of numerous species of beautiful corals and coral reef communities of life that are critically important in the aquatic food chain. Nature's miraculous balancing processes are thus temporarily compensating for our wasteful polluting ways, but it is far too unwise to push our luck so recklessly!

We are, in reality, an inseparable part of the biological web of life on Earth, interconnected and interdependent. Since we are at the top of the food chain, our fate is linked inextricably to the continued productivity and health of this oceanic lifeline. Conservation biologists tell us it is folly to obtusely harm this biotic foundation of well-being, yet here we are, doing just that.

Dr. Sylvia Earle, as if pleasantly and mercifully echoing a thunderous voice from Heaven above, says Save *the seas NOW".* We must alter our collective habits, reduce carbon emissions into the atmosphere, establish wider protections of marine ecosystems and rainforests, and institute effective incentives and disincentives that will radically alter the negative impacts associated with our aggregate human activities. *Initium est dimidium facti,* said the Romans, back when they spoke Latin: "The start is half the deed."

Big picture perspectives and foresight are vastly more reliable means for the salvation of humanity than to cast our hopes and prayers into the skies and blindly believe that some divine being has a master plan and loves us and cares about our fates. Since we influence our own destinies by the gods we choose, we would be wise to choose a God that isn't a divine being that plays favorites, but instead is a force indistinguishable from Mother Nature, wonderfully providential but infinitely unforgiving. Natural processes create a complex and amazing self-regulating system that is defined by natural physical laws, and every individual living thing lives and dies according to the nature of its kind. Species survive only by living in harmony with natural selective pressures, and by experiencing a modicum of good fortune. It should be understood that these natural processes do not have any knowable divine intent or purpose, or any mystical Gaia consciousness force.

It is remarkably shortsighted to oppose protections of marine habitats. Only about 4% of all ocean areas were protected in 2009 when Dr. Earle recommended that people around the world should increase the extent of these protections to 20% by 2020. That didn't happen. It was a truly laudable plan to ensure that these vital resources remain sustainable far into the future. And the clock is ticking. Barack Obama incidentally deserves much thanks for having protected a larger area of ocean marine reserves than any other leader ever!

As Timothy Jones said: "Give a man a fish, and you'll feed him for a day. Give him a religion, and he'll starve to death while praying for a fish." Let's all get evangelical! Here is a truly worthy purpose: Let's save ourselves! Our transcendent obligation is becoming more obvious, to those in the know. Fair is fair. Save the seas!

In 2008, according to Gaia hypothesis guru James Lovelock, humanity was experiencing a period similar to 1938-1939 -- at that time, "we all knew something terrible was going to happen, but didn't know what to do about it". But once the Second World War was under way, "everyone got excited, they loved the things they could do ... so when I think of the impending crisis now, I think in those terms. A sense of purpose -- that's what people want." A modern equivalent of "victory gardens" is called for, along with good collaborative cooperation.

Interestingly, one of the most effective influences in getting people to take bold remedial actions to a big problem is to suffer the provocation of a crisis. The most recent crisis arrived with historic suddenness, in the

form of a deadly virus, but here was a better plan. We should NOT have waited until the next crisis came along before beginning to act. Better preparedness is eminently prudent and naturally providential. Let's act NOW! Intractable denialism is not an auspicious quality. "I see it with everybody," says Lovelock. "People just want to go on doing what they're doing, they want business as usual. They say, 'Oh yes, there's going to be a problem up ahead,' but they don't want to change anything." But change we must, whether intelligently by choice, or by dumbly waiting until we are forced to adapt to worsened conditions just to survive.

By spewing 40 billion tons of carbon dioxide into the air every year like we've been doing, human beings may put as much of this heat-trapping gas into the atmosphere in the next 500 years as volcanoes in Siberia did in 100,000 years during the Permian Extinction. The fossil record tells us that more than 90% of all marine species were wiped out in that worst-ever episode of mass extinctions. The cause of this biotic disaster is fascinating -- it involves voluminous flows of magma in the biggest igneous extrusion that ever took place on Earth, in the Siberian Traps of what is now eastern Russia. This provides us a compelling cautionary tale.

Women of the World, Unite! (Men, Join Us!)

Another core idea in this manifesto is that the education and empowerment of women around the world would yield big benefits for everyone concerned. Programs with this goal would contribute to a better overall quality of life. In our male-dominated patriarchal societies, inadequate respect is given to women's health, security, dignity, sexuality, accomplishments and perspectives, or to fair pay and women's personal rights, reproductive choices and other prerogatives. Change must come! Excellent reasons exist for giving women much better representation in the halls of power. For a fuller understanding of such ideas, see *Feminine Vision of an Achievable World: Anima Should Reign* (it can be found online, or in Book Five of the Earth Manifesto).

One of the unexpected implications of this idea is that ideological extremism in opposition to fairer treatment of women is not reasonable, and it is not ethical, and it is not virtuous. Fair-minded compromises are needed! Churches, in particular, need to evolve, and to take back control from domination-demanding conservatives in their flocks! As Nelson Mandela once provocatively pointed out: "It always seems impossible, until it's done."

Cherish Mothers and Children!

Here is a convincing psychological and socioeconomic perspective on social justice that provides a profound way of seeing why nations worldwide should take bold steps to reduce inequality and social inequities. Dr. John Bowlby was a psychiatrist who devoted his life to understanding and promoting human well-being and mental health. He formulated "attachment theory" to explore and explain the integral aspects of human development. His major conclusion, grounded in the available empirical evidence, was that a requirement for growing up with good mental health is that "the infant and young child should experience a warm, intimate, and continuous relationship with his mother (or permanent mother substitute), in which both find satisfaction and enjoyment". Dr. Bowlby emphasized the important role of social networks and both economic and health factors in the development of well-functioning mother-child relationships. He called on societies to provide better support for parents, and his words resonate today with a resounding moral truth, echoing forward from 1951:

> "Just as children are absolutely dependent on their parents for sustenance, so in all but the most primitive communities, are parents, especially their mothers, dependent on a greater society for economic provision. *If a community values its children it must cherish their parents.*" (All parents, white and non-white!)

Unfortunately for our society's health, conservatives in the USA today demonstrate more concern for human embryos and fetuses than they do for real children -- or their mothers. Many Republicans want to give fertilized eggs the expansive rights of personhood, and to curtail the rights of women to use contraception or to freely choose to have a safe abortion. They also generally want to cut spending on health care for mothers and children. This is a coldly cynical political calculus that is a form of pandering to right-wing conservatives. There is much more moral rectitude and respectability in Dr. Bowlby's honorable understandings. Evaluated from ethically consequential viewpoints, Republican national policies on women's rights are often morally repugnant, especially in the big picture of people's general welfare and a truer quality of life for all. Extreme gender injustices in socially conservative countries worldwide make many other places even worse.

An Aside on Purpose

I have made my best ongoing efforts to integrate the most farsighted modern understandings in this Common Sense Revival, in an attempt to passionately persuade people everywhere that our collective salvation is best sought in fairness principles, smart priorities, wise planning, good organization and inclusive collaboration.

Here's an overview of some of the contents of this Common Sense Revival. My essay *Uncommon Sense and Fair-Mindedness* contains important perspectives, including things that I feel like shouting to high heaven about, like Robert Reich's perspectives in the outstanding film *Inequality for All.* Reich makes it clear that corrupting special interests have skewed our national priorities and contributed to a more constricting concentration of wealth. As a pathetic result, hardships, stresses, infringements on liberties and other negative developments associated with growing inequality have become exaggerated, and impetuses for a "vicious economic circle" have ramped up, while proper conditions for a "virtuous economic circle" have been diminished.

An interesting back-story pulses deep within each individual. Robert Reich, for instance, is very short, standing less than five-feet tall due to a genetic condition. He was bullied as a child, so he sought protection by making friends with older boys. Mickey Schwerner, one of his most respected friends, was later murdered by members of the Ku Klux Klan while he was involved in civil rights activism in support of voting rights for black people in Mississippi during the *Freedom Summer* of 1964. Reich cites this event as a major inspiration for him to "fight the bullies, to protect the powerless, to make sure that the people without a voice have a voice." His efforts today to help the American people in their struggles against inequitable policies deserve the greatest respect.

In *Happy Harbingers in Good Ideas for a Better Future,* clear concepts deliver the goods referred to in this title, so it should be given due attention. It begins with my curiously fanciful autobiographical story about my heritage as Mark Twain's philosophic great-granddaughter, and explains my feelings about being a soul mate heir of this marvelous author's intellectual and humorous perspectives.

The Vital Need for Good Religion

Creation stories and other foundational religious myths can play a vital role in people's lives. A crucial aspect of our personal experiences is a deep emotional need to try to understand and explain existence, and to find a sense of purpose, belonging, self-identity, and good guidance in a world of impersonal and inexorable laws of nature, and of chance happenstance (and of rigged institutions!). We have powerful needs for motivating myths to help inform our beliefs and our values, our feelings, our philosophies, our moral conceptions, our worldviews, and our futures. "The poet understands that a myth is not a lie, but the soul's version of the truth."

One thing that seems obvious about Creation stories is that they fulfill important roles in every culture that has generated them. It is also apparent that religions can die out and drift off into the realm of legend and fable, as times and cultures change. Enveloped in any Creation story at a given point in time, believers feel that all the gods and goddesses in their pantheon of deities really exist -- or that their one specific God is the one and only true and right Supreme Being. Infidels and heretics decamp!

The Genesis story in the Bible has been interpreted as giving people the right to have dominion over every other creature that creepeth and crawleth on the face of the earth. This time-tested tale is subtly used to reinforce rationalizations that say God strictly commands us to be fruitful and multiply. Now that people have obeyed these edicts for two millennia, changing conditions have begun to prevail. Our activities, in aggregate, are ominously driving millions of species of life toward extinction because humanity has managed to multiply our numbers from around 50 million people alive when the Old Testament was written to over 8 billion today. These increasing numbers make it vital for us to perform a simpler arithmetic operation -- Go Forth and Add!

The number of wild animals on Earth has shockingly been reduced by an average of more than two-thirds in the past 50 years, according to the Living Planet Report 2022. This tragic fact is juxtaposed against another sensational statistic: the total number of human beings has more than doubled in the past 50 years. I am not either a scientist or a statistician, but anybody can see the writing on the wall. We are living in unsustainable ways, already in risky stages of human population overshoot. We should shift our collective priorities from high global rates of reproduction to goals that would help assure a better quality of life for the people who have

already been born, and for ones who will follow. A goal of zero population growth should be accepted as a precautionary best plan to avert an eventual catastrophic population collapse. For broader perspective, evaluate these curious paradoxes in *Climate Change Considerations, Carrying Capacity, and Ecological Overshoot*.

I believe strongly that it is a moral mistake to wear blinders and become fixated on the idea that any Creation story or "holy book" is literally true. For literal truth, a good place to start is to understand that every human being has always come from a woman's womb, and the first woman did not come from a man's rib. Literal interpretations of holy books are a narrow religious fundamentalist view that can provoke people into doing terrible things. As Voltaire said, "Those who can make you believe absurdities can make you commit atrocities."

Atavistic literalism of belief is foolishly inflexible. Blind convictions can become socially dangerous and anti-adaptive, especially when married to authoritarian impulses or sectarian religious fundamentalism or parochial passions, or the fanned flames of white supremacy or belligerent nationalism. This is glaringly apparent today with intense religious strife around the world, and with zealots fighting culture wars, and suicide bombers, and with all the atrocities that have taken place in the past two thousand years involving things like persecutions, pogroms, religious wars, Inquisitions, ethnic genocides and burning women at the stake.

Since myths can be vital to our emotional and even physical well-being, a new guiding myth would be widely beneficial if it provided us with better guidance in our on-going cultural evolution. A much better understanding of the evolutionary roots of ethics and religion could help us accept an evolving conception of a popular new defining mythology that could safely guide us to a more propitious future. Both ethics and religious beliefs have been smiled upon by natural selection when they have served to promote cooperation within clans and social groups. Cooperation between individuals just happens to be more mutually beneficial for a group's survival than selfishness or greedily ruthless competition (or oppressive authoritarian rule).

A new guiding myth should incorporate responsible tenets that honor social and ecological truths, and it should be flexible enough to avoid being ossified into a rejection of the best evolving understandings of science. This new moral compass should be more believable and inclusive, and it should not be shackled to social conservatism or economic fundamentalism or uncompromising domineering authority. Such an evolved worldview would help us deal more sensibly with the social and ecological crises we face in the world.

While a vital need for myths that define us exists in human awareness, these foundational stories cannot be like the one in the Bible that calls for the utter annihilation of others who hold different beliefs. Faithful believer? Agnostic? Atheist? Agree to seek common ground, and to be tolerant of others who have different beliefs.

All religions need to adapt to survive and remain relevant, and to help the faithful as circumstances change. For this reason, traditionalist conservative wings of every religion should yield their insistence on dominating their faith traditions. Jesus, after all, was no conservative! He was, in fact, a revolutionary who opposed the Roman occupation of his homeland and championed the downtrodden and the poor against money-grubbing collaborators in the hierarchy of priests in Jerusalem. Religious establishments should allow moderate and liberal elements within their ranks to reform their faiths and steer them toward fairer guidance, greater relevance and safer and more inclusive ways forward. Progressive ideas are needed, not dominion by reactionary conservatives!

A Call for More Sensible National Priorities

Many formidable challenges confront us in the world today. Underlying most of them is one of the most serious problems of all: our national priorities are ridiculously askew. One primary factor that contributes to this state of affairs is that Americans have allowed government "of the people, by the people, for the people" to become a sham. Moneyed interests have subverted the common good, and our politics has become so polarized that the resulting gridlock is acting as a barrier to smart action and reform. The richest 1% of Americans has in effect corrupted our economic and political systems, making them into disastrous misrepresentations of the real greater good. Economic inequality and the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few are reaching extremes rarely seen in history, paralleling the gaudily tumultuous Gilded Age of the late 19th century and the dangerous brink of the Depression at the end of the Roaring Twenties. And the United States has become an "incarceration nation", with a larger percentage of its population imprisoned than any country on Earth.

These are times that try people's souls, as Thomas Paine was wont to say. Epic conflicts confront us, and yet the best interests of the majority of people, and of everyone in the future, are being undermined by despotic factions that have engaged in public corruption to greedily grab outlandish benefits for themselves.

Even though we are aware that "United we stand, divided we fall", we allow politicians and demagogues to divide us by hijacking our emotions, exploiting hot button cultural issues, and hyping up prejudices and resentments. Such divisive tactics help exploiters subvert our democracy, and make it easier for vested interests to usurp power and abuse that power to gain an ungodly proportion of the wealth generated in our economy for the few.

It is a fascinating perspective to understand that there was truly broad bipartisan leadership in passing all the bedrock environmental laws of the 1970s, including the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act and the Endangered Species Act. In his provocative book *Getting to Green,* the political independent Frederic Rich explains how a "Great Estrangement" began in the 1980s and 1990s that has led to extreme polarization on environmental issues. During the years since Bill Clinton was first elected, conservatives have taken a hard tack to the right, and the Green movement has drifted to the left, so environmental issues have oddly undergone a disastrous transformation "from common cause to divisive wedge."

It's a shame and a tragedy that this demise of bipartisanship has taken place since those days of successful environmental initiatives. Vicious and vacuous political dialogue and extreme rhetoric on both the right and the left have had the effect of dashing hopes for us to create a much better balance between the positive aspects of honest conservative philosophies and the positive aspects of liberal philosophies. This balance is needed to enable us to create truly saner and healthier societies. Frederic Rich argues that this estrangement will not end with "conservative capitulation to the compelling urgency of the Green agenda; instead, the Green movement will need to listen to conservatives, take a few steps in their direction, and focus on that space where the values of right and left overlap." Unfortunately, the right has lurched to acting with obtuse reactive intransigence.

Frederic Rich calls potentially auspicious areas of agreement Center Green: "Center Green takes as its model the national land trust movement, a corner of the environmental movement that has succeeded in maintaining vigorous bipartisan support. Center Green is a modest change in approach rooted in the way America is, not a utopian vision of what it could become. It is, above all, pragmatic and non-ideological, where policy is measured not by whether it is the optimum solution, but by the two-part test of whether it would make a meaningful contribution to solving an environmental problem and whether it is achievable politically."

Counterproductively, "movement conservatism" has gained an ungodly grip on the USA. This is an "interlocking set of institutions and alliances that has won elections by stoking cultural and racial anxiety, but used these victories mainly to push an elitist economic agenda, meanwhile providing a support network for political and ideological loyalists." It enlists evangelical conservatives to collaborate with Big Business in an unholy alliance that takes advantage of hot button social issues in order to secure trillions of dollars in tax cuts for the richest people. Movement conservatism thus represents one of the most outrageous bait-and-switch schemes ever, as judged by the extremely consequential negative impacts of this ideological subversion of greater good goals.

Our representatives are fighting pitched battles among themselves for power and influence, and refusing to make fair, farsighted compromises that would advance the common good. Instead, they are exploiting divisive social issues and people's anxieties, insecurities, resentments, frustration and anger to perpetuate a status quo that is too unfair and unsustainable. Even worse, they exploit these feelings to change things in retrogressive ways. As a sad consequence, we are failing to deal adequately with big problems like the climate crisis, excessive damages to the environmental commons, assaults on wildlife and biotic well-being, offshoring of technical service and manufacturing jobs, impacts of automation, wrongheaded priorities and gaping injustices.

"We need a kinder and gentler politics," said British Labor leader Jeremy Corbyn after the murder of legislator Jo Cox by a crazed proponent of having Britain make a "Brexit" departure from the European Union. "We all have a responsibility, in this House and beyond, not to whip up hatred and sow division." It is becoming vividly clear that we should re-order our national priorities to fairly and effectively address the far-reaching social, environmental and economic problems that confront us. To do this, we need to fix our political system so that gerrymandering cannot drive increasing polarization and Big Money can no longer dominate our policy-making.

Choosing to Maximize the Right Things

Imagine for a moment how much knowledge has been gained in the 246 years since American colonists declared independence from Britain and espoused great democratic ideals. At the same time, think about studies that measured the factors that contribute to people's happiness and the general welfare. Surprisingly, it turns out that people are much happier overall when the national income is more broadly distributed than when it is highly concentrated in the hands of a few.

Here's the specific story. Extensive surveys of public opinion have found that people are happier, as gauged by a wide range of measures, when they earn $50,000 to $75,000 per year than when they make less money. They are happier in every category that affects the quality of life, including job satisfaction, emotional sense of security, personal relationships, community involvements, physical health and spiritual life. In contrast, the same studies have found that people who make more than $75,000 per year are NOT that much happier than those who earn this much. Research on the "economics of happiness" reveals that, once people can easily afford the basic necessities of life, money takes on a less central role in their sense of experienced well-being.

The key understanding here is that, when prosperity is more widely shared, it results in improved outcomes and better security for all. This is a cogent argument for resisting the corrupting influence of high-income earners to abuse the power of their moneyed influence to get government handouts and big tax cuts. As it turns out, public policies designed to ensure a broader distribution of wealth dovetail nicely with another great promise of democratic governance, which our Founders strived to create -- to wit, that governments should be designed to prevent despotic abuses of power and political influence by any one person or faction.

Sing Glory Be to God that we know how to make our country much fairer, and thus happier and more secure! We just need to prevent huge corporations and wealthy people from abusing the influence of their overweening power to rig the system ever more drastically to their narrow advantages. Every alert reader who is following this unfolding story close enough will realize -- Eureka! -- that there are ways to head in the right direction to achieve common good goals, and there are ways to head in the wrong direction. Having realized this, please indulge in reading further while I navigate the shoals of "the Curse of Knowledge" that prevents communications from being conveyed simply, engagingly, credibly, memorably, and in an effectively motivating manner.

It is astonishing to most people that the bottom-line story of our top economic priority since Ronald Reagan took office has been to allow people who earn the highest incomes to pay the lowest possible rates of tax. This goal has been achieved by the short-term-oriented expediency of borrowing more than $30 trillion since 1980 to finance this unaffordably generous government largess.

Tax laws, it turns out, are among *the most politically determined* of all laws. Most people are surprised to find that every taxpayer basically pays the same amount of tax on the incomes they earn. A person who earns $500,000 owes the exact same amount on the first $50,000 of taxable income as a taxpayer who earns only $50,000 in taxable income. This is truly fair. The progressive structure of the tax code applies higher rates on higher levels of earnings, and this is smart, for there is a wide range of needs in complex modern civilizations, and the money to satisfy these needs is best supplied by people who have prospered under the provisions of the current system, and thus have the good fortune to be able to easily afford to pay more.

There are some exceptions to the fact that all taxpayers pay the same rates of tax on all levels of earnings. Tax cheaters don't, for instance. The main legitimate exception is that, when income is made from investments instead of being earned through work, much lower capital gains tax rates apply. And, since more than two-thirds of all capital gains stunningly are earned by the top 1% of Americans, these low rates are mainly given to people who are already the most financially privileged. The Tax-Return-Concealer-in-Chief emulated "Wrong Way" Corrigan on tax issues like this in order to enrich himself and his family.

More steeply graduated tax plans are the best means to make the distribution of wealth fairer. Regressive changes in the tax structure, in contrast, inevitably create a more extreme state of concentrated wealth in the hands of the few. The highly regressive changes in taxation that have been put into effect since 1980 have had the undesirable effect of making our society much less equitable. Morbid symptoms have resulted. For

instance, according to Bill Moyers several years ago, "The richest 400 Americans now own more wealth than the bottom 180 million taken together." This is a preposterously obscene degree of inequality and accompanying injustice. As Louis Brandeis, a Supreme Court Justice from 1916 to 1939, once stated, "We can have democracy in this country, or we can have great wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we can't have both." Our democracy is threatened, and faces not only heightened inequality but also a historic Constitutional crisis with a twice impeached former president monetizing sedition against the common good, and deviously scheming, and having proven to be deadly dangerous by inciting an insurrectionary riot to stay in power, and now relentlessly promoting election lies to try to regain power.

Two of the starkest outcomes of growing economic inequality in the USA are (1) the tragic worst-in-the-world death toll of the coronavirus on the American people, and (2) the widening gap in life expectancy between rich people and poor people. This is one of the pathological consequences of the obsequious attitude of politicians in allowing rich people to abuse the power of their moneyed influence. On-going trends of increasing inequality, from this standpoint, can literally be a matter of life and death.

We should naturally wonder what is causing this growing gap in the well-being and life expectancy between rich people and poor people. One factor that directly contributes to this nefarious aspect of inequality is the high cost of health care. Another is that people who earn lower incomes are disproportionately exposed to workplace risks, pollution, toxins and other negative environmental health dangers. Higher incomes allow people to avoid cheap, unhealthy fast food, and to buy higher quality and more expensive and nutritious foods (like organic ones) that help promote good health. People in lower socioeconomic classes tend to be more vulnerable to infectious diseases and respiratory ailments, as well as to chronic stress and premature aging, and to have propensities to drink excessively or to harm their health by smoking tobacco or abusing drugs. Gun violence also impacts this group much more often than others.

The United States ranks 40th in the world in life expectancy, according to a ranking in Wikipedia in December 2021. Japan leads this ranking at an average longevity of 84 years, while the U.S. is only at 78 years. A commendable concern for the general welfare of our nation's citizens should motivate us to really understand all the factors that drive this state of affairs, and to take bold steps to ameliorate them. As seen in situations near and far, the broadest understandings are needed to enact the fairest national policies and priorities.

How could we ensure that more people earn between $50,000 and $75,000 per year? A short list of common sense methods comes to mind. We could improve the affordability of education and fairness of opportunities. We could institute higher minimum wage laws, expand eligibility for overtime pay, and give working people more influence by guaranteeing them collective bargaining rights, and make larger public investments in needed infrastructure and environmental protections. We should also provide better cost-contained universal healthcare, and put a price on carbon with a fee-and-dividend plan that would be both influential and egalitarian in impact. And we should make our system of taxation more progressive by reducing taxes on all earnings under $75,000 and increasing taxes on all earnings in excess of this amount. I'm sure readers could think of many other good ways to accomplish this broad-minded goal. Let me know what you propose!

Elaboration on the Life and Views of Thomas Paine

Thomas Paine published his influential pamphlet *Common Sense* in January 1776, just six months before the American colonies declared independence from the exploitive rule of the British Empire. With this historic salvo of ideas, Thomas Paine helped change the course of history by making a forceful case for both individual liberty and independence, and he proposed enlightening ideas about the desirability of giving much fairer representation to the voices and best interests of all citizens.

Taking advantage of plain truths similar to those articulated by Thomas Paine, this Common Sense Revival is being published to advance fair-minded proposals and help solve crucially important challenges. Back in the days when the U.S. Constitution was written, people were aware that "eternal vigilance" is necessary to preserve liberty and guarantee people a range of personal freedoms. Today we need to be more committed and clear-eyed in our vigilance against tyranny, and should strongly support expansive personal liberties. And, simultaneously, incentives should be used to help motivate each and every person to contribute more to the common good.

Thomas Paine modestly expressed the hope that his *Common Sense* would represent the "straggling thoughts of individuals" that would provide guidance to "wise and able leaders" so that they would be successful in making marked improvements in society. Similarly, it is my hope that the ideas in this manifesto will be seen as well-considered ideas of a reasonably objective observer, and that these perspectives will prove to be a powerful stimulus in motivating our leaders to implement fairer and more ecologically intelligent national policies. Voters should always vote for honest representatives who are most likely to be wise, able and fair!

Persuasive good ideas could reverse the trend toward dysfunction in our political system today. Heck, not only could they help remedy the serious problem of our having a shortage of reasonably fair "wise and able" leaders, but good ideas could serve to mitigate hyper-partisan strife and reduce the extent to which our representatives excessively pander to narrowly-focused interest groups. These ideas could even force leaders to be more virtuous, instead of having them continue to primarily pander to entrenched interest groups, and prevent them from so shrewdly scheming and acting in such overly self-serving ways, and being arrogantly uncompromising and ideologically inflexible, and recklessly abusive of positions of authority.

When we honestly consider the legacy we are leaving to posterity, we should remember the words of Thomas Paine in *Common Sense:* "As we are running the next generation into debt, we ought to do the work of it, otherwise we use them meanly and pitifully. In order to discover the line of our duty rightly, we should take our children in our hand, and fix our station a few years farther into life; that eminence will present a prospect, which a few present fears and prejudices conceal from our sight."

Broad-Minded Communications

We stand before a crossroads in the history of our country. Formidable challenges lie before us, and most of them are complicated, serious and contentious. In an odd stroke of misfortune, many of the substantive issues like climate change that face humanity were inadequately discussed and considered in the Obama and Trump presidential campaigns. The failure to talk about crucial challenges is dangerous to our collective well-being, and to all people in the future. We need to stop burying our heads in the sand when it comes to important issues!

These issues include a need to conserve resources, protect the environment, develop cleaner renewable sources of energy, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere to mitigate the damaging impacts of changes in global weather patterns and the temperature and chemistry of ocean waters. We should also deal more sensibly with big problems like global health, poverty, malnutrition, overpopulation, overfishing and the destruction of rainforests, wetlands, coral reefs and other vital ecosystems. We should improve public education, and prevent the risks associated with corporations becoming too big to control and "too big to fail". Effective steps should be taken to reduce high levels of incarceration in prisons and to cut down on gun violence, and to stop the ridiculously costly war on drugs, and to reduce the unaffordable costs of America's military and wars and security state. We need to have civil deliberations about these things, and boldly deal with them!

How can we find a way to begin paying closer attention to big problems in our elections, and in all of our national decision-making? How can we ensure that, in our national political discourse in general, we will address the biggest challenges in a fairer, more serious and more respectful way? Deceitful demagoguery is not the answer!

Professor Jared Diamond made a valuable observation in his insightful book *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed.* He contended that we need a paradigm shift in how our leaders think. America needs leaders with "the courage to practice long-term thinking and make bold, courageous, anticipatory decisions at a time when problems become perceptible, but before they reach crisis proportions." Hallelujah! Let's give stronger support to progressive leaders who will act accordingly! Politics-as-usual is becoming too risky to allow it to be perpetuated without far-reaching reforms, and reactionary conservatism is wrongheaded.

Martin Luther King, Jr. once stated: "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." This arc can, and does, get bent backward toward more injustice for periods of time, but the majority of people should reasonably, honorably and assertively demand changes to the tragic trajectory of such trends. Let's reverse course, and move forward together!

A lofty vision of hope and fairer social justice and ecological salvation sails onto the scene, accompanied by sounds of a soaring Beethoven symphony that has the potential to swell in the interstices of our minds.

A Necessary Gauntlet Is Thrown Down, and So Be It!

Donald Trump chants "Make America Great Again". But the ways he tried to do this don't make sense. His leadership was risk-laden on many fronts, including harms caused by his extremely divisive tactics, shrewd scams and diabolical invective against anyone who objects to his misdeeds. The League of Conservation Voters pointed out during the 2016 election season that the worst aspect of Trump's candidacy, from a long-term ecological perspective, were his repeated indications that he would cripple the Environmental Protection Agency and reject clean energy initiatives and abrogate American commitments made with every other country on Earth in the Paris Accords, which are designed to help mitigate the impacts of human-induced climate change. And so it came to pass. Additionally, Trump gave more big deficit-financed tax breaks to rich people like himself, and more unaccountable power to big corporations. This makes it more challenging to fund public schools and smart social insurance programs that keep revolutionary unrest and discord in check.

These attributes, along with his eagerness to deport millions of immigrants and launch trade wars and act with treachery on the international stage, made it appear that he wants to make America great again by abandoning precautionary principles and Promethean foresight altogether. To more fully understand implications of such potentially disastrous stances, see *Intelligent Precautionary Principles Enunciated – Holy Cow!* True salvation must be found in collaborative efforts to ensure greater social justice, reduce extremes of inequality, create conditions more amenable to ecological sustainability and peaceful coexistence, and establish a broad comity of citizens, embracing diversity and joined in good faith by fair-minded and farsighted leadership.

Despite an astonishing litany of serious shortcomings associated with the Demagogue-in-Chief's persona, racist rhetoric and bizarre pronouncements, and in spite of his harsh castigation of an Indiana judge with Mexican-American heritage who presided over a fraud and racketeering case against the now-defunct "Trump University" (which Senator Lindsey Graham declared to be "the most un-American thing from a politician since Joe McCarthy"), we Americans failed to reject his bid to become leader of the most powerful nation in the world.

Daunting challenges confront humanity and all life on Earth, so we must choose effective adaptive strategies rather than obtusely barricading ourselves in -- as if the best plan is to shelter in place in face of on-rushing challenges and changes. The respect-worthy black guy's tenure in the White House is being seen as increasingly commendable in contrast to that of his inflammatory successor. The excessive and unearned influence of MAGA Republicanism portends ill, as emphasized in *See Clearly, Sanity During Insane Times – Book Twelve of the Earth Manifesto.* What we need is better national plans and more fairly inclusive leadership, not volatile hotheads with self-centered agendas who engage in unlawful abuses of authority and unpatriotic foreign intrigue and fail to lead us in proper directions.

Good Ideas for a Better Future

Here's a surprising epiphany: one of the best ideas for a better future is found in a place not often envisioned: proper accounting! We currently allow profit-maximizing activities to be achieved, in part, by allowing corporate entities to externalize costs onto society, rather than by reasonably requiring these costs to be included in the prices of products produced and services rendered. By requiring such costs to be "internalizing", we would more properly account for wasteful and polluting activities, and people's aggregate behaviors and habits would be shifted toward less wasteful and more responsible ones.

A more sensible allocation of costs to their proper source would be eminently fair. Such plans would shift incentives and disincentives, and have powerfully effective motivating impacts by design. A new regime of fairer accounting would have the added advantage of having wide-ranging positive effects by significantly reducing the costs currently being socialized, thereby reducing budget deficits and the amount of waste, pollution, climate-altering greenhouse gas emissions and environmental damages. It would also serve to spark innovation, promote efficiency of energy use, stimulate resource conservation, and commendably speed up progress toward a necessary transition to renewable energy alternatives.

A correlated good idea for a better future is to be found in implementing incentives to encourage sustainable activities. This should be coupled with effective disincentives that would reduce wasteful uses of resources and also mitigate damages to wildlife habitats and ecosystems. Pigouvian "green fees" on fossil fuels and carbon emissions are a concrete example of such smart disincentives. A carbon fee-and-dividend plan could be instituted, as advocated by the Citizen's Climate Lobby, which would both reduce emissions and make our societies fairer. Some of the money raised from green fees could be used to finance relief and recovery from natural disasters, among other good purposes. Natural disasters, after all, are getting ever more costly as climate disruptions cause weather patterns to become more extreme and chaotic in localities around the globe.

Burning fossil fuels at current rates is harmful to the environment, especially hurting poor people around the world. Robert Pollin made this point in his book *Greening the Global Economy.* Big oil and coal companies, and those involved in fracking for natural gas, make claims to the contrary, trying to refute this perspective, but Robert Pollin "powerfully demonstrates that investing in efficiency and renewable energy generates a far better standard of living than the current alternative -- abject and massive dependency on fossil fuels."

Implementing fees on carbon emissions is a good idea for three important reasons. First, the resulting higher price on carbon would reduce demand and stimulate innovative efforts to conserve fossil fuel resources and promote alternative energy sources. Second, the fee would generate large amounts of money that could be used to pay for adverse impacts of gaseous emissions on millions of people's respiratory health, as well as natural disasters related to intensifying storms, droughts, wildfires and coastal flooding caused by climate change and rising sea levels. A carbon fee would be an effective mechanism to internalize costs currently being externalized. And third, the fee could be part of a progressively designed fee-and-dividend system that would give some of the proceeds back to everyone in an egalitarian way that would fully cover the higher costs of energy for the bottom half of people who would otherwise face hardships in paying for the higher costs of gasoline, heating oil and electricity generated by burning fossil fuels.

These ideas are consistent with observations Paul Hawken made in *The Ecology of Commerce*. He points the way for how we should be working to improve our societies: "To create an enduring society, we will need a system of commerce and production where each and every act is inherently sustainable and restorative. Just as every action in an industrial society leads to environmental degradation, regardless of intention, we must design a system where the opposite is true, where doing good is like falling off a log, where the natural, everyday acts of work and life accumulate into a better world as a matter of course, not as a matter of conscious altruism."

This is a crucial insight. As the need becomes ever more urgent for us to restructure our economic and political systems to make them fairer to people now and in the future, it is becoming clear that stubborn intransigence within our two primary political parties is no longer acceptable. Our political duopoly system, as Charles Ferguson noted in *Predator Nation,* is misguided precisely because it allows vested interest groups to skew our national tax and spending priorities into a pathetic caricature of propriety. The continued failure to sensibly restructure our economic system casts harsh light onto the foolhardy nature of allowing environmental costs to be foisted onto society. And it shines a glaring spotlight on the absurdity of perverse incentives and the shrewd expediency of incurring record levels of national debt to allow the wealthiest Americans to pay taxes at rates near the lowest levels in generations. We cannot allow inertia and vested interests to prevail. As the need for us to invest in greater well-being becomes more obvious, new approaches are clearly required.

<u>Bankers Culpability</u>

In the documentary *Inside Job,* narrated by Matt Damon, director Charles Ferguson provides a comprehensive analysis of the causes of the 2008 global financial crisis. This crisis cost an estimated $20 trillion worldwide, and it caused millions of people to lose their jobs and their homes in the worst economic recession since the Depression of the 1930s (before the pandemic turmoil). Ferguson states unequivocally that pervasive Wall Street fraud was involved in this crisis, which nearly caused a global financial collapse.

"Three years after a horrific financial crisis caused by massive fraud, not a single financial executive has gone to jail," Ferguson later wrote. "And that's wrong!" This outrage inspired Ferguson to do more research and then write *Predator Nation,* a compelling indictment of both factions in our political duopoly.

No reports have yet come out whether any financial executives have arrived in Dante's eighth circle of Hell for the Fraud they engaged in. It is noteworthy that millions of small-time criminals, poor people, desperate people, and sellers and users of marijuana fill our prisons in the U.S. today. The really big crooks, however, have engaged in various shades of fraud that have contributed to crashing the national and international economy, and yet nonetheless secured trillions of dollars in bailouts and liquidity stimulus to prevent another Depression. These people are treated as luminaries and pillars of society, and they are members of a hyper-privileged elite that is ironically rewarded with most of the benefits of our national policies -- and low tax rates.

Not only has nobody gone to prison for the *Inside Job* that caused the 2008 recession, or for widespread mortgage fraud, but no one was incarcerated for having misused risky financial derivatives to make large sums of money. And no one was punished for ruses that resulted in the harsh recession that necessitated huge government bailouts. Not a single person has gone to prison for these schemes, which caused millions of people to lose big amounts of home equity and retirement security.

If we truly want a happier ending for millions of hard-working Americans, including heroic healthcare workers and teachers, firefighters and other government employees, we should stop blaming them for budget deficits, and instead blame the corporate CEOs, bankers and Wall Street fat cats who largely control the economy and benefit from debt swindles, and who helped cause dire economic straits that afflicted the U.S. for years in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis. Tens of millions of people were forced to face hardships as a consequence of these adverse developments. Scandalous is far too mild a word for this state of affairs!

When Will a Year of True Economic Populism Arrive?

Early in 2014, some political pundits proclaimed that the year would be "The Year of Economic Populism". This sentiment was a marriage of optimism and a pragmatic recognition that on-going rash increases in inequality in American society are going to turn out very badly for everyone, including the wealthy, unless courageous actions are taken to reduce the increasing concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the few. Conservatives proclaim Ronald Reagan to be their hero, but as sure as shootin', Reagan was the person most responsible for having wrought a wrongheaded revolution in the 1980s that is contributing to a record high national debt today.

Ronald Reagan was wrong in his folksy contention that "government is the problem". Bad government, and allowing profit-prepossessed giant corporations to exert a merciless hegemony over the people, are much bigger problems. These conditions are exacerbated by deregulated swamp monster malfeasance and ruthless free market fundamentalism and economic Shock Doctrine swindles and authority-abusing rule.

Steve Bannon once said that an "economic nationalism" movement has arrived that prioritizes American citizens above everyone else, and "the only question before us is whether it is going to be a left-wing populism or a right-wing populism." A holistic clear understanding would overwhelmingly favor choosing a liberal approach.

President Obama made a significant speech in December 2013 in which he called growing inequality and lack of upward mobility "the defining challenge of our time." He pointed out that the motivating American Dream is being shattered by the dual problems of income inequality and declining social mobility. This idea is crucially important, so listen to some excerpts from his speech: "People's frustrations run deeper than recent political battles. Their frustration is rooted in their own daily battles -- to make ends meet, to pay for college, buy a home, save for retirement. It's rooted in the nagging sense that no matter how hard they work, the deck is stacked against them. And it's rooted in the fear that their kids won't be better off than they were. They may not follow the constant back-and-forth in D.C. or all the policy details, but they experience in a very personal way the relentless, decades-long trend … that jeopardizes middle-class America's basic bargain -- that if you work hard, you have a chance to get ahead."

> "I believe this is the defining challenge of our time: Making sure our economy works for every working American. It's why I ran for President. It was at the center of last year's campaign. It drives everything I do in this office. And I know I've raised this issue before, and some will ask why I raise the issue again right now. I do it because the outcomes of the debates we're having right now -- whether it's health care, or the budget, or reforming our housing and financial systems -- all these things will have real, practical implications

for every American. And I am convinced that the decisions we make on these issues over the next few years will determine whether or not our children will grow up in an America where opportunity is real."

"The problem is that alongside increased inequality, we've seen diminished levels of upward mobility in recent years. A child born in the top 20 percent has about a 2-in-3 chance of staying at or near the top. A child born into the bottom 20 percent has a less than 1-in-20 shot at making it to the top. He's 10 times likelier to stay where he is. In fact, statistics show not only that our levels of income inequality rank near countries like Jamaica and Argentina, but that it is harder today for a child born in America to improve her station in life than it is for children in most of our wealthy allies, countries like Canada, Germany or France. They have greater mobility than we do, not less."

"So let me repeat: The combined trends of increased inequality and decreasing mobility pose a fundamental threat to the American Dream, our way of life and what we stand for around the globe. And it is not simply a moral claim that I'm making here. There are practical consequences to rising inequality and reduced mobility. For one thing, these trends are bad for our economy. One study finds that growth is more fragile and recessions are more frequent in countries with greater inequality. And that makes sense. You know, when families have less to spend, that means businesses have fewer customers and households rack up greater mortgage and credit card debt. Meanwhile, concentrated wealth at the top is less likely to result in the kind of broadly-based consumer spending that drives our economy and, together with lax regulation, may contribute to risky, speculative bubbles."

"And rising inequality and declining mobility are also bad for our families and social cohesion, not just because we tend to trust our institutions less, but studies show we actually tend to trust each other less when there's greater inequality. And greater inequality is associated with less mobility between generations. That means it's not just temporary. The effects last, and create a vicious cycle." … "And finally, rising inequality and declining mobility are bad for our democracy. Ordinary folks can't write massive campaign checks or hire high-priced lobbyists and lawyers to secure policies that tilt the playing field in their favor at everyone else's expense. And so people get the bad taste that the system's rigged. And that increases cynicism and polarization and decreases political participation that is a requisite part of our system of self-government."

Those words about social cohesion are of particular importance. Our national motto, *E Pluribus Unum,* means "out of many, one." We Americans are so accustomed to divisive politics and discord today in our outrageously monopolized and systemically corrupt political duopoly system that we do not feel the full force of the great value of social cohesion in our communities and countries. Social cohesion, though, is the original civilizing force that natural selection has chosen over thousands of passing generations as a crucial bond for the survival of human clans and tribes, and later agricultural communities, city-states, kingdoms and nations. And now today, fairer treatment of others is a form of social bonding that offers us the best hope of social cohesion that will help create civilizations capable of surviving the formidable social, economic, financial and environmental challenges that all humanity will face in the future. Divisive tribal Trumpism is the antithesis of this value.

Concluding Comments to this Introduction

The time for these important ideas has come; they are NOT, as Thomas Paine put it in his incendiary pamphlet *Common Sense,* "not yet sufficiently fashionable." When Paine advocated a new form of fairly representative government that would be virtuous because it would honestly serve the interests of all the people, he wisely focused on ideas, not specific individuals. He did this to establish objectivity in his analysis of the "absurdity" of despotic rule. And he cleverly justified the vehemence of his arguments -- and lent his work significant gravity -- by referring to the "cause of America" as "the cause of all mankind."

His cause has indeed become crucial to all of humanity. But rich conservatives have manifested no inclination to agreeing to make fairer compromises on issues of taxation, reforms of voting rights and campaign financing, more power for working people, comprehensive immigration reform, or a strengthened social safety net. So it is our duty to demand a more inclusive agenda, and everyone should honestly contribute to helping create a healthier, more peaceable, more sustainable, and more secure world for ourselves and our descendants.

Greater independence of the American people from the overweening power of wealthy people must sooner or later arrive. These sentiments are equally applicable to peoples in countries worldwide. Rich people, after all, are concerned mainly for their own short-term interests, and too many of them are not adequately concerned with the well-being of the majority of people or longer-term values, or the common good of the whole of society.

In Thomas Paine's day, there were two different ways by which independence from tyranny could be gained. One was to work within the colonial system to achieve reforms, and the other was to break entirely free from Britain by declaring independence. It appears today that there are three ways we could deal with the tyranny of power abuses by domineering wealthy people: Either we let the voice of the people be better represented, and make sensibly fair reforms; or we allow feelings of frustration and anger to build until another economic and political cataclysm results, with violent protests breaking out in the streets and finally forcing our leaders to make wide-ranging reforms; or we let a more authoritarian rule be imposed that suppresses people's rights, represses dissent, and silences people like creative folks, artists and intellectuals who conscientiously object.

"We have it in our power to begin the world over again," declared Thomas Paine. He said we must make difficult and farsighted choices that, one day or another, would dramatically influence the fate of America. In *Common Sense*, he made it completely clear which courses of action he believed we should sensibly choose.

A Comedy, or a Tragedy?

In classical literature and theatre, artistic creations were classified as either comedies or tragedies. The main difference was that comedies had happy endings, while tragedies had tragic ones. Surely we should be striving in our modern times to redesign our societies to improve the probability that our descendants in the future will be able to look back and say we committed ourselves to happier endings, rather than that we allowed excessive greed to rule and left them with more severe inequities and tragedy-of-the-commons disasters.

To make marked improvements in our world, we should reject the usurpation of power by wealthy people and those who pander to them, and demand they stop severely afflicting our nations in the present day. We need to give recognition to the fact that narrowly focused interest groups like giant multinational corporations cannot be trusted to show adequate concern for the greater good. Shame upon wealthy people for their stubbornly hard-hearted conduct in insisting on ever-more power, money, privileges and dominating control for themselves.

A relatively objective assessment of the two primary political parties in the U.S. reveals that the Republican Party threatens our individual liberties and overall well-being much more than the Democratic Party. After all, while Democrats lean toward positive aspects of "socialism" and policies that would create greater equality, Republicans push for policies that give bigger pieces of the economic pie to the few. Conservatives couple this misguided tactic with austerity measures for everyone else, and lean toward domination of our decision-making by wealthy people, big corporations and right-wing politicians and judges.

Republicans have historically been worse for economic growth, worse in driving up the national debt, and worse for hopes that we will adequately protect natural ecosystems and the environmental commons in the best interests of our children, grandchildren and untold numbers of human beings in future generations. History confirms that Republican presidents are less fiscally responsible than Democratic ones. Statistics on the national debt show that the debt has consistently grown faster in the past 50 years when Republicans occupy the White House. This is due to Republican politicians having more success in giving rich people tax breaks and pushing for higher levels of military spending than in making difficult decisions necessary to control spending.

Demagogues exploit people's anxieties, insecurities and fears, as they egregiously did in a debate between Republican presidential candidates in December 2015. That political debate focused on twin issues of terrorism and immigration in the aftermath of terrorist attacks in Paris and the gun slaughter by two ISIS supporters at a facility for individuals with developmental disabilities in San Bernardino. The toxic tone Republican politicians adopted has a strong bias toward authoritarian imposition of control over the populace. The debate among Republican candidates also featured glaring propaganda blaming the black guy in the White House for every woe we face, particularly including the instability and terrorism stoked in the Middle East by George W. Bush's unnecessary and very costly "preemptive war" against Iraq. And our overall economic prosperity and broader

economic well-being have been torpedoed at every turn by dominion-demanding "conservatives" in Congress.

Without so much fomented fear and prodded prejudice, the Republican propaganda machine would likely collapse of its own ethical wrongheadedness, and lose power. Conservative politicians have such adamant compulsions to gain more power that they encourage evangelical religious fundamentalism, and in the process they give counter-supporting energy that strengthens Islamic extremism, which it avowedly hates. This internecine spiral could be countered through wise seeing and honorable action, and giving support to moderating voices. One of the worst examples of the Republican compulsion to control *We the People* is their official rigid platform that tries to figuratively keep women barefoot, pregnant and subservient by making contraceptives and day-after pills more difficult to obtain, and by outlawing safe abortions, no matter what the circumstances.

Robert Reich created a sensational two-minute whiteboard video presentation concerning the seven principal unprincipled "principles" that were the favorite ideas of Paul Ryan, the former "Young Gun" and Speaker of the House. These were the top priorities of "conservative" Republican politicians in the U.S. Senate and the House at the time, and of Republicans in general. All these plans would have adverse effects on the vast majority of Americans, and they would be evidently contrary to the common good. These misguided and misguiding leadership goals are distinctly anti-populist because of their unstated but crystal clear over-emphasis on priorities that dramatically favor the fortunes of the top 1% of Americans while harming the prospects of working people and middle-class families -- and dashing their hopes to have a fair chance to improve their lots and get a few crumbs from the bounty of the increasingly monopolized and restricted American Dream.

Worst of all, from the overarching perspective of the ecological focus of this manifesto, is the fact that the tripartite priorities of maximizing private profits, giving most of the profits to the richest 1%, and shredding the safety net would have catastrophically consequential adverse impacts on the biotic foundations of Earth's providential ecosystems, and on hopes for the sustainability of usages of finite natural resources. By doing the bidding of anti-progressive elements in society, working people are more easily exploited, making them more desperate and less supportive of environmental protections. This is not good. Shrewd foxes are intent on taking over the henhouse, and we must find ways to oust them before they wreak horrible havoc on all the chickens.

On issues related to the on-going destabilization of the global climate by excessive emissions of greenhouse gases, remember the Hippocratic oath that wisely stipulates, "First, do no harm." The Republican refrain has long been to deny harms are taking place and to rationalize the maximizing of profits for Big Oil and Big Coal at the exceedingly high cost of wreaking serious damages on the ecological underpinnings of the long term well-being of humanity and the health of the web of life upon which all biotic well-being depends.

Note that I myself, Dr. Tiffany B. Twain, am not induced by motives of pride, party or resentment in espousing doctrines of greater fairness in our society. I am clearly, conscientiously and positively persuaded that the true interests of our nation and the world are to be found in once again embracing the fair-minded principles of our Founders; "Everything short of *that* is mere patchwork", so it would afford us "no lasting felicity". As Thomas Paine noted in an Appendix to *Common Sense:* "Had the spirit of prophecy directed the birth of this production, it could not have brought it forth at a more seasonable juncture, or at a more necessary time."

Ideas matter. Good ideas are good. Bad ideas and failed or inauspicious prescriptions are not good, and neither are half-truths, cultivated doubt, closed-mindedness of conviction, demonstrable falsehoods, coldly calculated corruption in politics, deregulated greed, tortuously gerrymandered thinking, or obstinate clinging to wrong-headed priorities. Let's honestly debate ideas, and come together over the best ones. And let's act accordingly!

In conclusion, I repeat the excellent piece of guidance by Giacinto Dragonetti that Thomas Paine so admired. Our political representatives should "fix the true point of happiness and freedom" by seeking to create "the greatest sum of individual happiness, with the least national expense." LET'S TRY IT! Let's generously and reasonably enlarge our views beyond the present, and work together to usher in a golden era of greater good.

Truly,
Dr. Tiffany B. Twain, Doctor of Philosophy
Evolving for decades, with latest tweaks on January 1, 2023

A Clear-Eyed Patriot Issues a Clarion Call for a Second American Revolution

Begun March 2018, latest update: June 1, 2023

In times of trouble
Seeking words of wisdom
Let it be. Let it be.

Friends, Washingtonians, countrywomen and countrymen, lend me your ears. I come to champion good ideas, and to constructively criticize all the bad ideas and shortsighted expediencies and abuses of influence that have gotten us into the perilous straits we find ourselves in today, in our marvelous world.

Twelve score and seven years ago, our Founding Fathers declared independence from the despotic hegemony of the British Empire. These courageous colonists then fought an American Revolutionary War against the imperious "redcoats", using effective early guerilla warfare tactics, and eventually won the war. After achieving victory, they set about working together to bring forth upon the North American continent a new nation, dedicated to liberty and the idealistic Enlightenment Era proposition that "all men are created equal."

To secure the "unalienable rights" that they had declared to be self-evident for all citizens, they commendably convened a Continental Congress of representatives of the people. Having asserted that government derives its just powers from the consent of the governed, our Founders assumed the important responsibility of hammering out a master plan for a new form of democratic governance that was to be guided by a Constitution and a Bill of Rights, and an evolving framework of theoretically equitable rules of law. Importantly, the Constitution contained critical protections from tyranny in the form of strong constitutional checks and balances in government.

The colonists' experience with the despotic rule by King George III had left them with a powerful distaste for abuses of power, so they created a sensible balance of powers between the executive, legislative and judicial branches of the federal government, and between it and the various States. They did this in an effort to assure the American people that they could enjoy liberty and would be forever free from despotic abuses of power, and that they would be represented reasonably fairly in all national decision-making. Today, I say, Let it be.

In the many years that have passed since those formative times, much progress has been made in expanding basic concepts of justice, equality, guarantees of liberties and fairer representation that includes women and people in racial minorities. These initiatives were designed to strengthen our Union in these United States of America, and to ensure that considerations of the general welfare are not ignored in the fierce competition between greed-driven individuals and narrowly–focused interest groups vying to gain control and advantages for themselves.

In the course of human events, and with the passage of time, corrupting influences have crept into our system of governance, and they have come to dominate our national decision-making. Our political representatives have been bought -- relatively cheaply! -- and they now mainly serve rich people and corporate executives and shareholders, NOT the best interests of the majority of Americans. Most of the politicians that are supposed to represent us are self-serving pragmatists who are afraid to tell the simple truth that our economy and political system are rigged to be unfair to most people, especially including women, Blacks, Latinos, poor people and the young -- and downright perfidious to the best interests of people in future generations.

Here is a provocative perspective from my 2009 essay *The Bailout Blues and Gut Check Soul Revue*: "The U.S. has been driving a hard bargain for the poor for decades by scolding them for lacking personal responsibility.

Welfare rolls and payments have been reduced, taxation has been made more regressive, and harsher and ever more costly punishments for crimes have been put into place. The influence of workers in determining their own fates has been insidiously reduced by corporations torpedoing collective bargaining rights. Many public schools and inner cities have been discriminatorily neglected. Businesses and millions of jobs have been moved abroad, and corporate prerogatives and profits have been enhanced, contributing to inflation in the costs of healthcare, food, electricity, gasoline, rent and homes. In contrast, no such hard bargain for the rich has been undertaken. Give us a break -- this is a democracy, folks! We've got 'em outnumbered!"

The challenge of how to deal fairly with extreme levels of inequality is one of the defining issues of our times. Lamentably, conservatives lusting for domineering control have been wielding excessive influence, and are derailing our democracy. They are in the process of abusing authority to accomplish goals that are making economic, financial and healthcare inequalities much worse, and exacerbating social and environmental injustices.

Common sense tells us it would be wise to avoid the revolutionary strife associated with extreme desperation and violent "politics in the streets". Let's strive to reach a bold and broad-minded consensus on how to honestly actualize the ideals and values we hold in common. Backroom decision-making, crony favoritism, structural injustices, harm-engendering discrimination, right-wing media spin, religious conservatism, machine politics, and undue influence of Big Money have been allowed to dominate our government for too long.

This situation makes it clear today that it is our right, indeed our duty, to throw off the hegemony of the misguided influences that have come to dominate our Union. It is time to put progressive policies in place, and limit Big Money in elections, and enact policies that make the vast majority of Americans more secure. We must adopt initiatives that provide all Americans with adequate healthcare and fairer opportunities to flourish and achieve prosperity and happiness. And the white establishment must treat folks in racial minorities more fairly.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower made a provocative declaration that should inform our understanding: "If a political party does not have its foundation in the determination to advance a cause that is right and that is moral, then it is not a political party; it is merely a conspiracy to seize power." Unfortunately, unprecedented challenges arose to the separation of powers in our government during the Trump regime, and personal liberties and the freedom from abuses of power -- and democracy itself -- have been under especially concerted assault.

The philosophic historians Will and Ariel Durant provide many thought-provoking *Lessons of History* that they had teased from two lifetimes spent writing an eleven-volume outline of world history. One of the most germane and important of their ideas is that a failure of elite factions to fairly compromise with the people has episodically led to violent revolutions, unless sensibly headed off by reasonable proactive reforms. Think about this incisive synopsis of everything the Durants had learned in a lifelong study of history (remember, these observations were made in 1968): "If our economy of freedom fails to distribute wealth as ably as it has created it, the road to dictatorship will be open to any man who can persuasively promise security to all; and a martial government, under whatever charming phrases, will engulf the democratic world." That's stunning -- and ominous! A consequential reckoning is coming as Trump and his zealous loyalists try to regain control through ruthless means. The remedy is easy: Vote for political representatives committed to reversing the harms that Republicans have been doing! And pass the Freedom to Vote Act and the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act to overcome voter suppression, and force Republican politicians to actually honestly compete for their jobs by trying to fairly represent the majority of the American people, not just zealots and the wealthy donors class.

Wise Guys Speak Out

The honorable Abraham Lincoln waxed eloquent about the ideals of our great nation after the bloody Battle of Gettysburg near the end of the terribly uncivil War Between the States. He made one of the greatest ever speeches, on a battlefield in southern Pennsylvania in November 1863, proclaiming his vision of the importance of representative democracy and governance "of the people, by the people, for the people."

In 2002, the progressive Senator Paul Wellstone of Minnesota stated that politics should be about much more than power, money and winning at any cost. He expressed the quite commendable opinion: "Politics is about the

improvement of people's lives, lessening human suffering, and advancing the cause of peace and justice in our country and in the world." I salute this important concept and vision!

The plain truth of the matter, however, is that idealistic understandings are not the main forces that guide our national policies. Inertia and motives of narrower vested interest groups drive most of the efforts made to codify into law the collective and often sadly skewed impulses of constituencies that compete for ascendency in our society.

The renowned journalist Ambrose Bierce, a contemporary of Mark Twain's, created a pithy satirical dictionary in which he defined words with witty and incisive perspicacity. Here is one of his smart definitions that provides a relevant and intriguing insight: "Politics, *n.* A strife of interests masquerading as a contest of principles."

Ambrose Bierce was "right-on" in this definition. All the high-falutin' rhetoric during U.S. election campaigns about vision, righteousness and the moral good -- and caring about the middle class -- is betrayed by the fact that the current intense competition for control of our government is largely a conflict between greedy rich people and "conservatives", on the one hand, and people with more broadly concerned, empathetic, inclusive and future-respecting perspectives, on the other. Ambrose Bierce was an investigative journalist who dared to take on the railroad "octopus" controlled by the infamous Big Four -- Leland Stanford, Mark Hopkins, Charles Crocker and Collis Huntington -- a monopoly that wielded enormous power and influence in Bierce's day.

Political commentator David Sirota corroborates this perspective that wealthy people and giant corporations exert too much control over our government. In *Hostile Takeover: How Big Money and Corruption Conquered Our Government -- and How We Take It Back,* he makes it clear that special interest groups are working to make governments operate in their own best short-term interests, and not in the best interests of the people. Both major political parties in our duopoly system pander to financial elites in society above all else, and they all-too-infrequently dare to take any action that displeases the richest 1%, or influential CEOs in big corporations.

This confirms Ambrose Bierce's second definition of politics in *The Devil's Dictionary*: "The conduct of public affairs for private advantage." This common sense evaluation expresses a much truer reality than most of the rhetoric we hear from our political leaders today. Yes, siree!

True patriotism consists of questioning and opposing abuses of power in one's country, not merely accepting them without question. As Mark Twain wrote: "My kind of patriotism and loyalty is loyalty to one's country, and not to one's institutions or officeholders." Trump cult followers, become disillusioned, and break free!

My own modern sensibilities regard fierce nationalism as alarmingly anti-social, and far-right "patriotism" as frequently fraudulent. It would be better for us to seek a kind of humanism that is consistent with Golden Rule reciprocity -- and loyal to equitable principles -- and gives a fuller respect to the great ideals espoused in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

Patriotism should not be unthinking obedience to the politicians and influential factions that wield domineering power. Patriotism in America should really be an honest commitment to principles, ideals and values this country holds dear. This includes the main concerns set forth by our Founding Fathers: unity, social justice, the general welfare, peaceable domestic tranquility, assured personal liberties, guaranteed civil rights, sensible limitations on the intrusiveness of government, and fair representation of the best interests of all the people.

<u>An Echo of Wise Solon Reverberates through the Airwaves</u>

Economics drives politics. In Athens more than 2,500 years ago, disparities of wealth between the rich and the poor created a dangerous upheaval. One faction favored democracy; another favored oligarchic rule by the wealthy few; a third preferred a mixed form of rule with a strong constitution. Clan rivalry and many regional conflicts also played a role in the strife of Athens in the 6th century BCE.

According to Will and Ariel Durant in *The Lessons of History,* the historian Plutarch wrote that, in the Athens of 594 BCE, "the disparity of fortune between the rich and the poor had reached its height, so that the city seemed to be in a dangerous condition, and no other means for freeing it from disturbances … seemed possible but despotic power." The poor found that their status got worse every year because the government was in the

hands of elite factions, and the courts were corrupt, deciding way too many issues against the masses. Talk of violent revolt reverberated through the Athenian city-state. The rich were outraged at the brazen challenge to their privileges, property and power, so they prepared to defend themselves by force.

As these conflicts escalated between various factions vying for perks, power and control, many recognized the need for a transformative leader who would seek fair compromises between all competing groups, and would do so in an equitable and peaceable manner. Providentially, good sense prevailed and moderate elements secured the selection of a wise Athenian statesman and lawmaker named Solon, who was known for having demonstrated the wisdom to fairly mediate between concerned parties. He was given extraordinary wide-ranging legislative powers to negotiate fair compromises.

Solon made a number of laudably fair reforms of the Greek political system and its economy that saved Athens from destructive conflict. He also addressed a wider agenda of moral issues like slavery, debt bondage, and abuses of the system of inheritance. One of the most important reforms he made was the creation of a steeply graduated income tax plan that made wealthy people pay taxes at a rate 12 times as much as the poor. This idea forms the basis for sensible proposals to reform the U.S. tax code by making it more steeply graduated. THAT action would result in broad benefits that really would trickle down -- even to those who desperately need it!

My fellow Americans, make no mistake about it; with the disparity of fortunes between the rich and the poor in the U.S. reaching unconscionable new extremes right now, the nation is in a dangerous tinderbox condition. The lessons of history provide us with an excellent alternative to gathering risks: choosing honorable leaders who are committed to making decent and egalitarian progressive reforms. Those who fail to heed lessons of history are more likely to be doomed to repeat them, so let's heed the lessons -- for authoritarians wait in the wings.

A few years ago, Robert Reich expressed optimism about the future of our great country. He pointed out that U.S. history has a progressive trajectory, despite periods of backward influences. He stated that reformers will eventually succeed in making our country a fairer place than it is today. We are at a critical juncture where we need to listen to and respect the will of the people, and refuse to believe BS or accept the vulnerabilities and hardships that result from the right-wing agenda. It's time to stop the why-isn't-it-trickling-down debt-financed swindles that assess low taxes on the rich. We must act to create a healthier, fairer nation.

To achieve the common good, we need clear-eyed understandings, and a hearty measure of broad-minded resolve. Now is the time for us to insist that our representatives begin to work together with an overarching goal of pursuing healthier, wiser, more just and more peaceable national priorities. For good guidance, it would be positive for us to responsibly give heed to the provisions of a Bill of Rights for Future Generations.

Victor Hugo importantly pointed out, "There is nothing more powerful than an idea whose time has come."

This is the counsel of the shade of Virgil, a veritable voice of reason, and of the spirit of beautiful Beatrice, whose inspiration of an empathetic heart could provide us with the motivation to embark on more virtuous, redemptive and morally honorable paths into the future. For an interlude of fascinating introspection, see the Earth Manifesto essay *The Odd Brilliance of Dante's Epic Poem, The Divine Comedy,* for it provides additional understanding of Dante's great poem and its personal, religious, historical, political and moral underpinnings.

One belief Dante essentially expressed in *Inferno* is that the hottest places in Hell are reserved for those who, in times of great moral crisis, maintain their neutrality -- or act in league with authority-abusing schemers. Let's not be complacent with inequities and injustices in our world today. Reject power abusers! Dante chose to consign those who commit acts of fraud to the eighth circle of Hell, so he placed them only slightly above the worst of his nine circles of *Inferno* where those who committed cold-hearted intentional acts of treachery and treason were to be found. Conservatives and Republican politicians, shape up, or get out. Be aware.

<u>Women, Ride to the Rescue</u>!

Mark Twain once observed, "You can't depend on your judgment when your imagination is out of focus."

In times of trouble, we need leaders to speak words of wisdom to us -- true words, well-informed words, honest words, and responsible words. Women, it turns out, often make better leaders than men, as was demonstrated

in the global pandemic crisis. "From Germany to New Zealand to Taiwan and beyond, women executives are showing that compassionate, intelligent, and truthful leadership has proven essential in saving lives and stopping the spread of Coronavirus. Instead of laying the blame on others, these women are taking action and enforcing necessary safety precautions. They use policies grounded in facts and the latest technology. They listen to experts and don't let political issues affect decision-making. They show grace and humanity in thinking about how this virus affects *all* of the people in their countries."

Donald Trump and the male patriarchy, in contrast, politicized the pandemic and cunningly hijacked the government to advance a white nationalist agenda that cruelly discriminates against persons in minority groups, immigrants, women, the poor, young people and gays. It is a damning fact that Blacks and Latinos have suffered and died at terribly disproportionate rates from the miserable COVID-19 disease, much in excess of their proportion of the populace. This reveals systemic racial injustices and regimented socioeconomic stratification in our country, which are partially a result of a lack of fair representation due to restrictive voting measures and partisan gerrymandering. In turn, racial oppression continues, year after year after decade after century.

"Women who seek to be equal with men", ironically declared Timothy Leary, "lack ambition."

It is sensationally relevant to us today that our nation's Founders stated in the Declaration of Independence that whenever government becomes destructive of the ends for which it was established, "it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness."

After the ungodly triumph of Trump and conservatives in Congress in 2016, it became clear that Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren have been right all along. What the USA needs is a peaceful revolution that brings big positive structural change to our rigged system. We need to radically alter the wrongly rigged provisions that burden taxpayers and students with record levels of debt while stoking an ever-increasing concentration of wealth in the hands of the few. The few, of course, always seem to be in the process of ratcheting up their great advantages to the detriment of everyone else. This is happening, ironically, at the same moment that more than three years of the pandemic have sickened and killed large numbers of people, and the divide between the fortunate and the unfortunate has become a horrifically gaping chasm. (And Trump figuratively flipped the finger at other people worldwide, trying to shift blame and evade responsibility, and refused to contribute to supporting the World Health Organization.)

At a time when we clearly need unifying leaders who will honestly work to make our society fairer and more inclusive, and respect Golden Rule ethics of reciprocal fairness, Republicans have employed divisive tactics, and are arrogantly violating common good values. It would be best for the American people if folks in the MAGA base would see the light and stop helping enable abuses of authority, and unite in common cause to support reforms that would be beneficial to the 99%. This, after all, would also be an excellent means of saving the 1% from the proverbial pitchforks, which are being readied as the prospects of desperation and social turmoil spike, and repressive despotism flexes its muscles with things like "dress rehearsals for martial law" that took place in Portland, Oregon and other cities during protests against racial injustices in the summer of 2020.

<u>Ecological Truth</u>

> "If future generations are to remember us with gratitude rather than contempt, we must leave them something more than the miracles of technology. We must leave them a glimpse of the world as it was in the beginning, not just after we got through with it."
>
> --- President Lyndon B. Johnson, upon signing the Wilderness Act of 1964

One of the basic concerns expressed in this manifesto is environmental. That's why provisions for a proposed Bill of Rights for Future Generations include vital ecological ideas. Everything on Earth is naturally inextricably interconnected and interdependent, so considerations for the real health of natural ecosystems cannot be made independent of comprehensive concerns for fairer economic policies and the greater good of society in the long run. Likewise, considerations of economic policies can't be made with little regard for environmental concerns.

Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. warned Americans back in 1996 not to "treat the planet as if it were a business in liquidation". He astutely told people at a Toronto conference, "To me, environmental advocacy is not just about protecting the fish and the birds for their own sake. It's about recognizing that nature is the infrastructure of our communities. When we actively destroy nature, we diminish ourselves. We impoverish our children."

Sensible business owners know they should operate their businesses using the income they generate, for they cannot stay in business long if they squander their assets and equity. It is folly for us to allow corporations to try to convert natural resources to cash as quickly as possible. Such a strategy may give an illusion of a prosperous economy in the short run, but schemes that allow Big Businesses to externalize costs and deplete resources force our children, in effect, and theirs, to bear the costs of these selfishly shortsighted activities.

Robert Kennedy also pointed out that we should make bigger investments in protecting the environment because that would help assure the well-being and economic vitality of generations of people alive today, and not forget those to come in the future. In our hyper competitive free market crony capitalist system, when we under-value natural resources, we foolhardily contribute to their excessively wasteful usage.

The cogent words of Bill Moyers resonate in the interstices of my brain. Moyers noted that when he reads the news about all the things humanity is doing in the world, he concludes it's not as if "Father, forgive us, for we know not what we do." As he looked at photos on his desk of his five grandchildren, he thought: "We do know what we are doing. We are stealing their future. Betraying their trust. Despoiling their world." Arguably, it is our greatest responsibility to be good ancestors.

It is our collective duty to act more responsibly. It is for good reasons that Franz Kafka observed, "Nobody wants to introduce as many reforms as children do." Nobody's reforms would be as fair to people in the future as those made in the best interests of young people. Conversely, when we let entrenched interests defend the status quo by focusing on benefits for rich people and older folks, we effectively betray the young -- and are too inhumanely stingy with healthcare coverage.

Smart environmental planning is more necessary than ever in the world today, and it is getting more crucial with every year that passes. This fact makes it absurd that a League of Conservation Voters scorecard that rates members of Congress on how they voted on environmental issues found that the average score for all Republican Senators in 2017 was the lowest ever recorded, at 1%. In praiseworthy contrast, Democratic Senators averaged 93%. House Republicans have voted on hundreds of occasions to weaken protections of the environment and endangered species of life. The time has come for better leadership that demonstrates much greater integrity, and acts more reasonably, so I urge Americans to demand that their leaders acknowledge and emphasize the importance of environmental protections. Insist on better accountability, and remove Republican politicians from office! And outlaw former coal lobbyists from being administrators in the Environmental Protection Agency.

Think clearly about the treacherous nature of the way we are treating the prospects of our children and our grandchildren. We are profligately using up natural resources, failing to conserve energy and water resources, allowing natural ecosystems to be damaged and wildlife habitats to be destroyed, and wantonly foisting the detrimental health and environmental costs of pollution, toxic wastes and greenhouse gas emissions upon people everywhere. And we are irresponsibly borrowing many trillions of dollars to hyper-stimulate these outcomes.

This whole litany of collective short-term oriented activities is being significantly exacerbated by the myopic expediency of promising a cornucopia of unfunded obligations for healthcare and retirement costs for millions of government employees, military veterans, and people over the age of 62. It is estimated that there was more than $96 trillion in promised but unfunded obligations like this as of May 2021. This far exceeds our national debt, and represents more than $280,000 for every man, woman and child in the United States.

These facts are all but unbelievable, revealing our national policies to be a form of intergenerational treachery. To allow this heedlessly shortsighted, manifestly corrupt and unfair favoritism is unacceptable, and to facilitate it with financial scams and accounting gimmickry is wrong. These ruses resemble an odd new variant of a Ponzi scheme, on an unprecedented scale, and it boggles the imagination to think we could be acting with such a lack of responsibility toward people in the future. Now is the time for clearer understandings, and for taking much

more courageous stands for a better future. The Dalai Lama is one of the wisest, most spiritually pure and cool, calm, and collected persons on Earth. Yet the cheerful and meditative Buddhist once said: "In order to accomplish important goals, we need an appreciation of the sense of urgency." Hold that thought.

I, Tiffany B. Twain, Doctor of Philosophy and imagined illegitimate great-granddaughter of Mark Twain, have a vision for the greater good of humanity. This vision is informed by overarching fairness principles and ideas of sustainable stewardship of our home planet. It is a vision that encompasses plans that would help foster more collaboration in good faith on the international stage, and attain common sense goals of having less strife and better prospects for health, justice, mutual security, peaceful coexistence and a sustainable future.

Common Sense Arrives on the Scene

Thomas Paine famously wrote, "These are the times that try men's souls." Paine was an Englishman who became a consummate American patriot. He helped change the course of history by writing *Common Sense*, a highly influential pamphlet published in January 1776. *Common Sense* originally had the working title *Plain Truth,* and it spoke plain truths and made straightforward arguments about society and government. This was probably the best-selling pamphlet ever published. In it, Paine forcefully advocated independence from tyrannical British rule, and he proposed enlightened ideas about the need and desirability for establishing a new form of government that would be more fairly representative, so that all people's voices would be heard.

It is noteworthy that Thomas Paine published *Common Sense* anonymously because the pamphlet was treasonous from the point-of-view of King George III and British Empire authorities. From our perspective today, this act of treason was one of the most laudably patriotic salvos against tyranny ever written. We now regard the cause of independence of the American colonies as having been central to the freedoms we enjoy. I imagine the stirring music of fifes and bugles and drums accompanying the march of these ideas.

The relativity of patriotism and treason casts a bright light onto our political strife today. Think about this. So-called conservatives want "to drown government in the bathtub", and give personhood rights to corporate entities, thus undermining rights and influence of ordinary people. Most of all, they want to give rich people larger tax breaks, and finance this generosity by borrowing public funds AND slashing spending that helps poor people survive, and middle-class folks to be more secure. Really -- they want to save money by skimping on smart social insurance policies. They want to undermine affordable healthcare and cut funding for Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security. They also want to stimulate consumerism, and facilitate the exploitation of fossil fuels and other natural resources. And they want to take away women's rights to make their own personal decisions regarding getting pregnant and their reproductive health, and the number of children they want.

We simply have been avoiding difficult decisions required to fairly compromise between competing interests, and we have consequently used the shortsighted expediency of borrowing huge sums of money from every taxpayer in every future year to achieve misguided priorities. This is exaggeratedly unfair. It would be a much better plan to act fiscally responsibly by creating rainy day funds for natural disasters and adaptive measures, and by investing in better preparedness for public health calamities like the global COVID-19 pandemic.

"Conservatives" have become increasingly unwilling to compromise with more moderate people for the greater good in the last few decades. They have been adamantly insisting that high-income earners should be allowed to pay ever lower rates of tax on the highest levels of their incomes. Many of them undermine efforts to conserve resources, and reduce protections of public lands in order to benefit private interests. Some advocate that we allow national parks and forests and other public lands to be privatized and more easily exploited. And many believe we should spend more on building up the colossal military, no matter how wasteful, misguided, dangerous, or subversive of peace. These are often the same people who used to advocate more aggressive U.S. stances on the world scene -- and who want guns and assault weapons at home to remain easy to obtain by anyone.

These obstinate ideological stances are narrow-minded attitudes that are radically contrary to honorable conservatism, and antithetic to true patriotism -- and downright subversive of the best interests of our heirs. It is also treacherous to the future of humankind, and heedlessly inconsiderate of most species of life on Earth.

A Question of Ensuring National Security and Domestic Tranquility

Edward Stettinius, the Secretary of State in 1945, identified two fundamental components of human security. "The battle of peace has to be fought on two fronts," he stated. "The first front is the security front, where victory spells freedom from fear. The second front is the economic and social front, where victory means freedom from want. Only victory on both fronts can assure the world of an enduring peace."

Think about the fact that there were a near record number of more than 45 million Americans living below the official poverty level in the USA before the pandemic. And understand that Social Security payments and other programs like food stamps, unemployment insurance and the Earned Income Tax Credit keep an additional 35 million people or so from poverty and worse hardship. These programs keep many millions of Americans out of more desperate circumstances, so they are a form of social insurance against more extreme insecurity of a large number of Americans. Social programs are thus a type of insurance against revolutionary unrest. These programs mitigate impulses toward the politics of anger in the streets, so they effectively allow the current system, jerry-rigged as it is -- so extremely in favor of rich people -- to be largely perpetuated, without being forced to enact big structural reforms. Improved social insurance policies would be relatively inexpensive!

Oddly enough, many wealthy conservatives have been growing ever more adamantly opposed to paying for this smart form of insurance. This stance is forcing huge costs to be foisted onto our children and all people in every future year. It should irk every American that conservative rich people have been exhibiting such an eagerness to shirk tax obligations that help pay for these insurance policies. Such opposition to unemployment benefits, nutritional assistance programs and the like is, in impact, crassly unempathetic, and sadly smacks of a sense of entitled hubris, severe shortsightedness, and even an attitude of arrogant and cruel hard-heartedness.

An "immense wedge" was being forced through American society during the Gilded Age by "the maldistribution of wealth, status, and opportunity," according to journalist Henry George over 100 years ago. Bill Moyers noted that inequality has exploded in recent decades into what historian Clinton Rossiter described as "the great train robbery of American intellectual history." Stop these brazen villains now! We must reform tax laws to make them more progressive, seeing how current tax laws are contrary to propriety, fairness and fiscal responsibility.

A Gauntlet Has Been Thrown

John Steinbeck wrote in *The Log from the Sea of Cortez* that ideas germinate in our minds and in the populace as a whole, but that they do not gain power and traction until they find the fertile soil of discontent to grow in. The force of this idea could cause a peaceful revolution in the USA today, for the soil has been well fertilized, and we have become ripe for such change. This was seen especially with unrest and widespread street protests in the aftermath of the George Floyd murder by white police officers. The right-wing unfortunately is good at sowing discontent and fostering fear and anger, so a coup like that caused on January 6 is also a risk.

I judge that really unempathetic ruses against fairness in our societies, perpetuated by those people with the most money, are causing energies to develop and gather force. Conservatives harvested populist discontent more effectively than liberals and progressives, but their policy prescriptions serve to make inequities, inequalities and injustices irrationally worse, even for most folks in the Trump base. So the time is ripe for clearly seeing this truth and supporting wide-ranging reform movements to set things straight. Liberal policies are required, NOT worsening reactionary demagogic ones in a corroded semi-fascist Trumpian dystopia.

James Madison was first elected in 1808, becoming the fourth President of the United States. Twenty years earlier, he had been instrumental in drafting the U.S. Constitution, and he was a key author and champion of the great Bill of Rights. Madison was thus one of the central figures among our Founding Fathers, and he deserves the respect of our attention. He says (paraphrased): "Beware of the abridgement of freedom of the people by gradual and silent encroachments by those in power. More violations of people's freedom have been effectuated by those in power than by violent and sudden usurpations." The danger is becoming grave right now.

These words from one of our foremost Founding Fathers should give us pause for serious reflection. We should heed these words and unite to oppose the many abuses of power that are taking place today, because these abuses are a driving force behind ecological shortsightedness, and are contributing to dire health outcomes, deepening inequalities, rapidly mounting public debt, inadequate investments in infrastructure, declining social

mobility, and a worsening general welfare in the USA. We should stop bowing to "conservative" ideologies, and instead champion liberal ideas of fairness and common sense concern for the greater good. The shocking growth of extremes in inequality of income and wealth between the top 1% of Americans and the other 99% is causing a serious abridgement of people's economic freedoms. And the corrupting influence of wealthy people in our money-dominated political duopoly system is facilitating despotic usurpations of power. The evil nature and extensive harms inextricably involved in these political games call for reform. Church leaders should "turn left."

Wealthy philanthropist Bill Gates once threw down the gauntlet to the wealthy: "I believe that with great wealth comes great responsibility -- the responsibility to give back to society and make sure those resources are given back in the best possible way, to those in need." Donald Trump's pandemic plan, in stark contrast, wrote Susan Glasser, was "*Absolute Authority", No Responsibility.* Let's pay closer attention to what is essential.

<u>To Do the Right Thing, or Not To Do the Right Thing, *That* is the Question</u>

To be, or not to be, that is the question
Whether 'tis Nobler in the mind to suffer
The Slings and Arrows of outrageous Fortune,
Or to take Arms against a Sea of trouble,
And, by opposing, end them …
Ay, there's the rub!
--- Soliloquy in *Hamlet,* by William Shakespeare

'Tis nobler, my conscience shouts to me in a respectfully muffled yet urgent tone, to proactively support common good goals, and to seize the moment by demanding fairer representation of common good interests, and by so opposing ideological wrongheadedness, to end its adverse and oppressive impacts.

Annie Leonard made a provocative assertion in *The Story of Change,* an excellent film in her outstanding *The Story of Stuff* series. She said the real power to create a fairer, healthier and more sustainable economy lies not in individual choices we make in buying things, but in coming together as citizens to build a better future. She also simply and brilliantly related how *The Story of Broke* is being used to shortchange students and the American people, and to radically transform our country into a less egalitarian place. Watch Leonard's animated films online for details -- and read on for some valuable perspectives and recommendations.

The American people should reject extremely partisan politicians who abuse power by dishonorably deceiving and betraying the people. We should be outraged at coldly calculating politicians who deceive people in important economic, health, environmental, social and military matters. In particular, we should reject every politician who tries to fool the American people with rosy rhetoric about freedom yet prescribes policies that give freedoms to rich people to evade taxes, and freedoms for corporations to pollute the commons, and freedoms for banks and big businesses to avoid rules designed to protect the greater public good, and freedoms of payday lenders to assess exorbitant interest rates, and freedoms of big corporate entities to roll back protections of working people and undermine public health laws, and freedoms of the gun lobby and the arms industry to exert excessive influence on our national decision-making. And we should reject freedoms of Republican governors and legislatures to restrict voting and gerrymander, AND to wage a perfidious war on women's rights.

Particularly objectionable are those politicians who adamantly oppose the freedom of women to make their own personal choices about having sex, preventing pregnancy, and making an achingly difficult decision to terminate a pregnancy when the circumstances commend such a course of action. And those who oppose the freedoms of students to get good affordable educations, and stand against minimum wage laws and higher pay for overtime work, and against women being paid equal amounts for equal work, and against universal healthcare. And those who oppose gay people having equal rights to heterosexuals. And those who staunchly oppose protections of public lands from overgrazing, privatization or corporate mining and fracking despoliation. We need better national plans to reassure people in future generations that the legacy we leave them will be one of reasonable hopes for safety, prosperity, economic solvency, and sustainable living.

Misinformation, negative attack ads, deceptive populist rhetoric, voter suppression efforts and absurdly

gerrymandered congressional districts have helped give conservatives much more power than they deserve. This is an anti-progressive development that makes our national politics much uglier and more dysfunctional, uncompromising, unfair, acrimonious and anti-environmental. Having Republicans in control of the White House and the U.S. Senate from January 2017 through January 2021 tragically undermined the rights and hopes of women, children, poor people, minorities, immigrants, gays and all in future generations. We must now strive to really reduce inequality and social injustices, and improve social mobility and prevent excessive harm to the environment. And we cannot let any leaders obstruct our obligations to the people in all other countries in the world that have agreed in Paris on the imperatives of acting to mitigate impacts of global climate change.

Further Observations on Anti-Egalitarianism

A great strength of democracy in the USA has always been its hope-inspiring capacity for adaptive self-corrections. Political power fueled by the growing concentration of wealth is undermining this central aspect of democracy, and casting doubts on our collective ability to achieve socially salubrious goals. Usurpations and abuses of power that diminish democracy -- shoed in through divide-to-conquer treachery -- are having a dire and corrosive effect on the economy and social cohesion, and on the longer-term future of our country.

The United States is being crippled by the stubborn unwillingness of the highest income earners to pay taxes at rates that are even 60% as much as the lowest rates in effect during the 45 years from 1936 through 1981. Many negative consequences result from our inability to collectively demand that narrowly-focused interest groups act more fairly to share prosperity. As we can see, obtuse and unempathetic avarice causes us, among other outcomes, to be unable to make adequate investments in improved healthcare, public education, a safer national infrastructure, sensible environmental protections, a strong social safety net, protected National Parks and open spaces, and a more stable climate.

Leaders of The Wilderness Society once stated: "We are seeing a dangerously unbalanced approach to our debt crisis. Conservation programs key to ensuring our long-term public and environmental health are being cut to the bone, while corporate polluters like oil companies receive billions in taxpayer dollars each year. Using borrowed money to finance government activities has finally reached a risky tipping point …". The people who have benefitted from this long reign of fiscal insanity should be the main ones who contribute to our nation's stability and recovery, and to achieving a better balance in federal budgets. Fie on MAGA Republicans!

We have been collectively kicking the proverbial can down the road for so long that we don't even recognize the consequences of fiscally irresponsible actions. The U.S. has gone from being the world's largest creditor nation in the 1970s to the world's largest debtor nation after Reaganism took root. Banking system regulations were eviscerated, and risk-taking was stimulated with easy money policies. Debt-financed bubble economic policies were instituted, and capital was given freer rein in its efforts to triumph over labor by curtailing the collective bargaining rights of workers. And a small elite segment of society usurped the wealth generated by increased worker productivity. These mega-trends are working out badly for the vast majority of Americans today.

President Obama Shared a Perspective

Barack Obama once suggested that the best way to grow the economy is from the middle out, not from the top down. "It's time for a new economic patriotism rooted in the belief that growing our economy begins with a strong and thriving middle class," he said. The American people have been forced to try the top-down method ever since Ronald Reagan launched his folksy revolution, and the results have been pathetic. Well, admittedly they have been financially very advantageous for the top 1%. For almost everybody else? Disastrous!

Let's try a different way. Let's enact a new simplified income tax system -- one that is more steeply graduated. This means everyone will pay exactly the same amount of tax on every dollar they earn, as they do now, but that higher rates will apply on the highest levels of earnings. This is the right way forward. It is the proper way, in both fiscal and economic terms, as well as in social and moral ones.

Consider this closely. Median household income roughly doubled between 1945 and 1980, and this increase was about the same as increases in worker productivity. But rich people generally seem to feel supremely entitled to maximizing their earnings and savings, so a strong resurgent movement began to crush the power of workers.

This movement was stoked by Ronald Reagan's permanent firing of more than 11,000 air traffic controllers who had gone on strike for better working conditions and higher compensation. This merciless termination started a long downward slide for American workers. Since then, almost all productivity gains in the economy have gone to the wealthiest 10% of Americans, instead of being more fairly shared with workers who help generate them.

Inflation-adjusted pay to working people has basically remained stagnant since 1980, despite another doubling in productivity in the past 40 years. This essentially represents a redistribution of wealth to the top. It is an outcome that reveals the extreme inequities in our economic system. Seeing this, we realize that income and wealth should rightly be more fairly distributed. The best way to accomplish this would be by enacting more steeply graduated tax rates on income, and also on capital gains and rich kids' inheritances as well.

Manifesto Rudely Interrupted

Improved group cohesion is a key to human security and sanity. As our societies worldwide struggle to adapt to rapidly changing economic, public health, demographic, geopolitical and environmental circumstances, the need for inclusive and broad-minded solutions based on shared values becomes ever greater. Yet at this crucial juncture, humanity is being subjected to one of the rudest and most nefarious episodes of toxic divisiveness ever, in the chaotic aftermath of a vicious 2016 election in which the most dangerous demagogue in American history became the leader of the free world, and autocratic authority-abusing politicians are usurping power in far too many countries around the globe.

The American people need a good therapist to help them better cope, along with rational and effective leaders who can articulate a visionary message of sanity, and who can recognize the vital importance of choosing an inclusive path forward. We need honest leaders who are auspiciously effective in communicating the deep and overarching need for us all to collaborate together to create much healthier societies. And we need to find good ways to keep manipulative politicians and media from dividing us, preventing reforms and ripping the public off. Responsible folks support the idea that we should adopt a raft of win-win solutions to our problems, thereby making the world more just, egalitarian, empathetic and more ethical,, virtuous and peaceable.

The USA would have been much stronger and more secure if we had succeeded in defeating the brazen bid for power by a deceitful authoritarian whose egomaniacal self-interest vastly exceeds his concern for the common good. The American people are justifiably angry at their increasingly insecure condition because rich people have been grabbing more and more of the nation's wealth for themselves. Millions of folks have valid grievances for the way our system has been rigged to their disadvantage, and they are being riled up by rhetoric and propaganda pushed by conservatives and white supremacists, who are making desperate efforts to preserve a white male-dominated American order, which they see slipping away as the USA becomes more racially diverse.

Inequalities and inequities are intensifying in the world, and injustices are proliferating as the wealthiest 1% of people jealously strives to protect and expand their privileges in the face of growing needs for fairer treatment of the 99%. Ayn Rand championed an ideology that regarded businessmen and industrialists as heroic, saying they should have superior rights, and conservatives have adopted this idea to modern circumstances to rationalize low tax rates on the rich and an increasing concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the few. But the simple fact of the matter is that everyone will be better off only when everyone is better off. Under Trump, the temperature in this pressure cooker got too hot, and the safety valve was screwed too tight, resulting in an unnecessarily risky state of affairs. We would be wise to turn down the heat on this pressure cooker of social unrest by implementing policies that are significantly fairer, so that there is expanded opportunity and inclusive prosperity and greater social justice. Costs of "social insurance policies" to accomplish this objective would be relatively inexpensive, and they would be Solon-wise and better for the 1% by being better for the 99%, thereby helping prevent disgruntled factions from coming out with proverbial pitchforks.

A Somewhat Objective Assessment

The Republican Party has devolved into a party of "rule or ruin", rejecting moderation and embracing partisan extremism. Republicans obstructed almost every initiative during the 8 years of Barack Obama's tenure in office that would have helped him succeed in righting the economy from recession and making the USA a fairer,

more prosperous nation. This extreme intransigence was consistent with their misguided top political priority: "The single most important thing we want to achieve is for President Obama to be a one-term president," declared Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell after the 2010 elections. Then in 2021, McConnell was once again Minority Leader, and cynically declared, "100% of my focus is on stopping this new administration."

Republican hard-line stances are blatant forms of political sabotage. Though targeted to make President Obama fail, and now to prevent President Biden from succeeding, they have the 'collateral damage' side effect of hobbling and harming millions of people in the process. By adopting these top political priorities, Republicans give this goal precedence over improving the economy, helping create jobs, investing in people's health, defending democracy, responsibly dealing with the huge national debt, protecting the environment, or ethically making our country fairer. Republicans have traditionally wanted to do aggressive "nation-building" abroad, but today they seem dead set against fairer and more sensible nation building at home. "They demonstrated a real animus toward doing anything that would have helped the black guy in the White House succeed, I reckon!"

John Steinbeck's son Thomas once said, "My father valued patriotism above all other social obligations, but he had his own particular interpretation of just how true patriotism was meant to function." … "From my fathers point of view, without a thought for self, a true patriot stands up against the stones of condemnation and speaks for those who are given no real voice in the halls of justice or the halls of government."

True patriots reject the strain of extremism that has hijacked the Republican Party, and oppose their harmful strategies. Hey, maybe we might even be able to alter the oppressive treatment of women, in all its economic and social, reproductive, psychological and cultural dimensions. That would be truly positive! If we really want liberty and justice for all in our great nation, we need to work together to actualize this fair-minded democratic vision. Let's strive to reach unity through adopting win/win consensus plans. And let's reject ploys to establish win/lose outcomes, which evidence reveals are the inevitable result of ever-more unfair crony capitalist laissez-faire "deregulated" policies and distorted national priorities -- and a corruption-enabled authoritarian agenda.

A second American revolution is needed to overthrow the insidiously despotic aspects of the new monarchs of tyranny in our nation. This second revolution must ensure that the architects of reactionary social, racial and environmental injustices are removed from halls of power. The first American Revolution threw off the tyranny of an imperial and undemocratic political system and an unfairly exploitive mercantile economic system that taxed people in the colonies without fair representation. The second revolution must throw off the tyranny of corrupt corporate politics and the cruel hegemony of wealthy persons and their obedient sycophantic supporters, whose selfish greed has saddled the people with undue austerity -- and is stealing from future generations to enrich the few today, even during a deadly global pandemic. This new revolution should be peaceful, progressive and more inclusive -- and it should come NOW! It should be guided by a visionary Bill of Rights for Future Generations, as specifically proposed in this manifesto. This is just *Common Sense!*

The young French nobleman and historian Alexis de Tocqueville visited America for 6 months in the early 1830s. In light of his experiences and observations, he wrote a poignant portrait about our country titled *Democracy in America.* He was frankly skeptical that we could make democratic governance work in the long run. But we have made it admirably far, and until the Con-Man-in-Chief was elected, it seemed probable that soon we will begin taking smarter corrective steps to fix the dysfunctionally inept and ultra-polarized political status quo, and begin to positively remedy the serious financial, social and ecological shortcomings of our current system.

I believe the English author Edward Bulwer-Lytton was onto something when he coined the adage, "The pen is mightier than the sword." The salvo of ideas in the Earth Manifesto is my attempt to set forth intelligent ideas to try to overcome the narrow idea-shaping spin and propaganda of irresponsibly exploitive interests. Let it be!

Truly,
Dr. Tiffany B. Twain
June 1, 2023

Insidious and Internecine Impacts of Inflation - A Closing Midterm Argument

An Earth Manifesto publication by Dr. Tiffany B. Twain
November 1, 2022

Inflation was a red hot issue in 2022. The specifics of this are evaluated below. But as preamble, know this:

Democracy is far better for a nation's people than authoritarianism. Freedom-loving people would be smart to choose democratic fairness instead of allowing rule by power abusing elites, system-rigging plutocrats, corporate CEOs, business shills, deceitful demagogic propagandists, right-wing extremists and forced birthers, and the like.

In the words of Professor Robert Reich, "The political struggle of our time is no longer left versus right, Democrat versus Republican. It is democracy versus authoritarianism."

Vote accordingly! Support national and state government candidates who stand for strengthening democracy. Fair rules of law and the Constitution really are enormously important to our collective well-being and liberties and the general welfare.

Elections have consequences -- and the consequences will be decidedly worse if Republicans gain control of Congress in the 2022 midterm elections, for the convincing reasons adduced below.

Inflation, Inflation, Inflation

Listen. It turns out that corporate profit-making is in fact the biggest factor fueling inflation. This is due to a record concentration in many industries, in which a small number of huge corporations dominate the market. This is generally the result of mergers and acquisitions and hostile takeovers, and a lack of government antitrust enforcement. High concentration generally leads to a diminishment in competition and "high pricing power" that allows dominant players to make bigger profit margins in a form of monopolistic price gouging to maximize profits.

"Rep. Katie Porter is known for using big whiteboards and grilling CEOs to make her case on a host of issues in Congress, and she's often shining a light on the ills of corporate greed. Her latest congressional presentation was focused on setting the record straight on what's really causing inflation in this country." Profit making, she showed, is responsible for more than half of the rapid inflation this year.

Concentrated power is enabled by concentrated wealth in our unreasonably laissez-faire capitalist system. And right now in the U.S., wealth disparities are more extreme than they have almost ever been. This offensive status quo is one of inequitable national policies and systemic inequities and corrupted politics. These things lead inevitably to unaffordably low tax rates on the rich and CEOs and big investors on their huge incomes and capital gains, and later on the inheritances of the families of the richest two-tenths of one percent of estates.

Abuses of power invariably lead to harmful outcomes for the people. They tend to lead, for instance to excessive inequities and injustices and political corruption, which generally wreak terrible consequences on people through bad policies and repressive actions and such.

Excessively unaccountable power also results in a grotesquely harmful litany of externalized costs and harms and risks onto others.

Arrogations of power also lead directly to woefully inadequate demonstrations of responsible behaviors by Big

Business, and of proper checks on them (sensible regulations). Power abuses also wrongly allow giant corporations to be more easily able to make maximum use of their highly compensated lawyers in avoiding accountability.

As President in the early 1900s, Theodore Roosevelt saw how harmful the general influence was of the "massive, exponential growth of industry superpowers" -- and of superrich people such as J.P. Morgan and John D. Rockefeller. "Disgusted by such unchecked power and wealth, Teddy decided he would fight the system and change the system." So he commendably engaged in Trust Busting during his eight years in office, dedicated to protecting the people from the onerous impacts imposed on people by huge corporate entities.

"When Theodore Roosevelt took office in 1901, the Sherman Antitrust Act had been in place for more than a decade. However, despite its goal of encouraging fair competition in the marketplace, the act had (so far) been an ineffective weapon. Established to prevent monopolies -- or dismantle those already in existence -- and encourage fair competition and prices for average citizens, the statute was far-reaching and would have been very effective. Unfortunately, most politicians ignored the law and refused to enforce it. So Roosevelt set to work putting the Act to good use." The time has come today to once again act to break up concentrated corporate power.

Where We Stand at this Moment in Time

Today, there is a more extreme concentration of super-rich monopoly influence than ever before. In Big Tech., all four of the largest market cap companies in America (Apple, Microsoft, Alphabet/Google and Amazon) are each worth well over $1 trillion, and they dominate their markets and our societies in historically extremely concentrated and nefarious ways.

Robert Reich, a former Labor Secretary, testified in a recent congressional hearing titled "Corporate profits are soaring as prices rise: Are corporate greed and profiteering fueling inflation?." He confirmed details about the decrease in competition since the 1980s, pointing out that two-thirds of all industries have become more heavily concentrated, and stated that this is the biggest contributing factor to the rapid inflation in 2022.

"They're passing these costs on to consumers in the form of higher prices. Why? Because they can," said Reich, who is now the chancellor's professor of policy at the University of California, Berkeley. "And they can because they don't face meaningful competition. If markets were competitive, companies would keep their prices down to prevent competitors from grabbing away customers."

"The smaller number of competitors is obvious in a number of industry sectors, where profits have grown slowly but steadily through the years. Big Tech, for example, is a small group of companies that dominate online commerce, which became even more essential during the COVID-19 pandemic. Other industries where this plays out notably include banking, oil and gas, and consumer staples."

The average profit margins of the 500 biggest companies in the U.S. (those in the S&P 500) are at highs never before achieved. Never before had profit margins reached 11%, but then they surpassed 12% in 2021 and are expected to reach 13% in 2022. "After-tax corporate profits in relation to GDP are at all-time highs in American history, at the same time that consumers face the worst price inflation the U.S. has seen in decades."

It is almost certain that a proposed merger of grocery giant conglomerates Kroger and Albertsons would result in a megalith grocery company, and the inevitable outcome would be higher prices for consumers buying necessities, and bigger profit margins for grocery businesses.

Other significant factors making inflation so onerous include pandemic related supply-chain bottlenecks and demand and supply-side distortions, along with higher oil prices caused by Putin's calamitous war against Ukraine.

Also, the Federal Reserve indulged for too long in easy money policy that kept interest rates extra low for many years, and now remedial monetary policy is a key reason for rapid increases in inflation this year. Scapegoated labor costs of workers' pay are actually contributing less than 10% to inflation that has taken place.

Most of these big factors causing inflation are largely beyond the control of national leaders, and cannot be fixed due to excessive influence by gargantuan corporations. Drain the swamp!

Inflation is a particularly red hot issue in 2022 because it has widespread and far-reaching impacts on millions of people across the U.S., and on billions around the world. Big increases in prices for gas, food, rent, houses, prescription drugs and most consumer goods make most people's lives more difficult.

The angst and hardships around inflation are giving Republican politicians effective fodder to attack Democrats. They are weaponizing inflation to grab more power in Congress in the crucial 2022 midterms, opportunistically and rather cynically using the issue of inflation as a cudgel to blame Democrats in attack ads, and deviously misdiagnosing the causes of inflation.

Dangerous misinformation is afflicting us all, on many topics, especially on issues related to inflation. For instance, inflation is not a problem caused by Democrats, and in fact is a worldwide problem. Inflation in Turkey exceeds 80% right now, and is almost 11% in the 27 countries of the European Union, in contrast to 8% in the U.S. Other misinformation is that, contrary to popular myths and propaganda pushed by conservative apologists for maximized profiteering, labor costs are causing less than 8% of increases in inflation, according to the respectable Economic Policy Institute, a non-profit think tank that carries out economic research and analyzes economic impacts of policies and proposals. "This is not normal. From 1979 to 2019, profits only contributed about 11% to price growth and labor costs over 60%." So today's excess of 50% due to profits, and only 8% for labor reveals an aberration.

Making profits by acting in ethically and morally irresponsible ways is reprehensible. Corporations often act like sociopaths in the compulsive pursuit of profit above all other considerations. It is wrong and socially unacceptable to have corporate entities be committed to maximizing profits for CEOs, investors and shareholders while severely disadvantaging and often harming other key stakeholders, particularly employees and the consumers or users of its products, as well as communities and citizens in our democracy.

Excess profiteering is a cold calculus. Corporate profiteering right now is perfidious for four main reasons. First, it benefits CEOs, top management and investors at the cost of causing real hardships for consumers. Second, it gives Republican politicians ammunition to effectively push misinformation about inflation and promote deceitful and deviously manipulative attack ads. Third, it hurts Democrats running for office to help fix problems, because the conservative messaging machine persuades people to blame the incumbent administration for inflation, even though Republicans stand with the 1% against the 99%, and work overtime to prevent remedial actions. Republican politicians promise, in effect, to make matters much worse by diminishing workers' bargaining power and cutting Social Security and Medicare, and taking other unpopular actions. And fourth, the valid grievances people have about the erosive impacts of purchasing power due to inflation give politicians unwarranted ability to abuse power, undermine democratic fairness and threaten democracy itself.

Wise Counsel

To conclude these insights on the causes and consequences of inflation, think about the wise words George Washington wrote at the end of his presidency. Remember George Washington's excellent advice in his famous Farewell Address in 1796, near the end of his eight year tenure as the nation's first president. He emphasized the importance of unity, and stated that the "worst enemy" of good government is loyalty to Party over Country. He urged Americans to resist factional alliances and always place the interests of the nation over their political and regional affiliations.

"When Americans voted according to party loyalty, rather than the common interest of the nation, Washington feared it would foster a 'spirit of revenge,' and enable the rise of 'cunning, ambitious, and unprincipled men' who would 'usurp for themselves the reins of government; destroying afterwards the very engines, which have lifted them to unjust dominion.'"

That was a prescient warning in light of the polarization in the USA today that is causing the Republican Party to embrace extremism and authoritarian violations of democratic fairness and of reasonable rules of law and the Constitution itself. We must reject bothsides-ism, clearly understanding that right-wing extremists have committed around 75% of the 450 political murders that occurred in the US over the past decade, compared with 4% attributed to left-wing extremists, according to a study conducted by the Anti-Defamation League.

In his great Farewell Address, published in a Philadelphia newspaper, Washington also raised fears about the future of the nation on account of foreign interference in elections and excessive debt, in addition to hyper-partisanship. We need to heed these warnings today, because the majority of Republican candidates for Congress and governor, secretary of state and attorney general positions are election deniers committed to putting heavy hands on the scale of justice by positioning themselves to treacherously overturn the will of the majority in elections. George Washington's Farewell Address became the most famous address in the nation, more widely reprinted than the Declaration of Independence for the first 100 years of our constitutional republic. We must heed the warnings in these wise words.

Serious Comedy Routine

Bravo for historian Heather Cox Richardson for her insightful observations about current events, expressed almost daily in her *Letters from an American.* Heather is an astute student of history, and there is great value to understanding historical context in our increasingly crazy, confused and chaotic world.

Also, kudos to humor and wit, for as Mark Twain once weighed in: "Against the assault of laughter, nothing can stand." A sense of humor, being born of perspective, bears a near kinship to philosophy. So let's laugh at every instance that God reputedly reveals a spiteful prejudice against women's reproductive prerogatives or the human rights of gay people. Let's laugh out loud at the supposition that God has ever really told anyone to launch a bloody war of aggression, like George W. Bush said He did in 2003, when he told some Palestinian leaders, "I'm driven with a mission from God. God would tell me, <George, go and fight those terrorists in Afghanistan.> And I did. And then God would tell me, <George, go and end the tyranny in Iraq..> And I did." And let's laugh at the follies of religious leaders like the Mormon Joseph Smith, who claimed God told him he could marry as many young wives as he could handle (apparently about 33).

Let's allow the healing power of this mirth to inoculate us against a belief in the next messianic madman who comes along preaching some odd gospel containing germs of self-serving behaviors that just happen to be terribly contrary to the greater good.

Journalist Alexandra Petri humorously explains the blame-shifting Republican charade on inflation in her satiric Opinion piece in the Washington Post on October 21 titled *Vote GOP! We'll fix the economy by making the rest of life worse, too!* Speaking for Republicans, she writes: " To our knowledge, we haven't been saying anything about the economy or offering any kind of exciting plan to fix it! As far as I can see, we've just been calling Joe Biden a socialist, fear-mongering about the existence of trans people and suggesting that people who want us to denounce antisemitism are 'Like 1984, But Worse'!"

"That's why we appreciate your confidence so much! As you clearly have realized, when one thing is going very poorly, you have options! Try to fix it, or just make everything else worse, too! Vote Republican, and we guarantee to do our level best to distract you from the economy by impeaching everyone in government, putting Marjorie Taylor Greene in charge of more things, and, in our spare moments, urging the Supreme Court to eliminate any more rights or protections that might be lying around!"

"I have always been a big believer in the idea that if you have a stomach ulcer, you should immediately also break your arm. Suddenly, the stomach ulcer is just one of a large set of problems you are dealing with! Time you would have spent dwelling on it is now time you will have to spend figuring out how to open heavy doors and brush your teeth with a cast."

"Well, that is how we feel about the economy. Is it bad? Absolutely! Do we have solutions? Is more tax cuts for the wealthy a solution? Okay, how about holding the debt ceiling hostage while we make cuts to Medicare? Please do not tell us if it's not a solution, because it's all we brought! ,,, If you return a Republican majority to Congress this fall, things will surely get worse. But there will also be so many other things going on that you won't have time to worry about it."

Truly,
Dr. Tiffany B. Twain

Uncommon Sense and Fair-Mindedness

Begun in 2015, with latest update: November 1, 2022

Democracy originated in ancient Greece. This was a great idea of fair representation in politics and governance that first flowered forth into history in this beautiful peninsula and island nation more than 2,500 years ago. The citizens of Greece passionately loved freedom, and respected reason and clarity of thought, so they cherished knowledge, balanced perspective, and the concept of all things in moderation. At the time, mariners in Greece "sailed on a sapphire sea washing enchanted islands purple in a luminous air", as Edith Hamilton eloquently observed in *The Greek Way.* Evocative music being played on a harp-like lyre heralds the arrival of these introductory words. (To listen to some of this meditative strumming sound, and be rewarded by watching a beautiful slide show tour of ancient Greece, see YouTube, *Ancient Greek Music – The Lyre of Classical Antiquity.)*

The people in ancient Greece appreciated knowledge for its value for living -- and not merely for its own sake. Knowledge was seen to be capable of leading people "away from error to right action." The Greeks "loved beauty with economy", as the statesman Pericles put it, and they embraced a kind of economy that was the opposite of mindlessly wasteful consumerism or hubris-filled materialistic grandiosity. To them, their gods were nearby "to watch over deeds of justice and kindliness", according to the poet Hesiod.

Throughout most of ancient history before the flowering of rationality and fair-mindedness in Greece, "nobles" and assorted despots or plutocrats ruled nations, and people were subjugated to the primacy of kings or dictators or a powerful oligarchic few. (Not so good.) One tremendous conflict in history was to decide whether freedom or tyranny is the stronger force: the wars between the Persian Empire and the Greeks.

Darius the Great was the ruler of the First Persian Empire at the peak of its power in the 5th century BCE. From his native Persia, Darius had conquered most of what is modern day India, Afghanistan, Iraq, the Balkans and Egypt, so he presided over the most extensive empire the world had seen until that time. Then he marched on Greece, "a rocky land and poor", intent on subjugating the defiant Greeks. A legendary battle took place on the small seaside plain of Marathon in 490 BCE, and the freedom-loving Athenians miraculously defeated the powerful tyrant and his huge army and navy. This event is often seen as a pivotal moment in early European history.

Ten years passed, and the curtain rose again for the next episode in this epic drama. Darius had died, and his son Xerxes brought another large army down the Meander River valley in Turkey to the Aegean Sea, verily intent on wreaking vengeance on the Greeks. He amassed his forces and sent them in 1,200 ships to engage the Greeks, who sailed their much smaller force of men in their trireme war galleys to narrow waterways near the island of Salamis. In the strategically confined straits, the freedom-defending Greeks were brilliantly led by a famed Athenian General named Themistocles, and they were able to vanquish the larger force in a decisive victory.

Perhaps Nemesis, the Greek goddess of divine retribution, had smitten the hubris-filled Persians, arrogant with their might and riches and fervor for conquering. In any case, they retreated back to whence they came, and Herodotus, "the father of history", noted what Aeschylus had written: "All arrogance will reap a harvest rich in tears. God calls men to a heavy reckoning for overweening pride."

We are engaged in another titanic conflict between freedom and tyranny in the world again today. The character of this conflict is assessed at length herein. I feel strongly that we should give support to broadminded, inclusive,

freethinking, democratic, progressive and common sense elements in society, and throw off tyrannies of economic fundamentalism, domineering conservatism, laissez faire crony capitalism, trickle-down deceptions, oligarchic hubris, authoritarianism, grave injustices, aggressive militarism and male supremacist religious authority.

A Revival of Wise Solon's Ideas

A new form of arrogance bedevils our American democracy today. It is an arrogance of wealth and privilege. Rich conservatives have been abusing their power ruthlessly, and have managed to get our representatives to let them pay taxes at rates that are near the lowest levels since 1929, despite our growing national needs and record amounts of public debt needed to finance this swindling fraud, and regardless of the urgent emergencies we are and will be encountering. They have hijacked our society to radically rig it so that privilege, wealth and power become more and more concentrated in the hands of a relative few. A bold course of corrective action is required. Some compelling lessons of history provide us with clear avenues forward that make excellent sense.

Think of the stage set back in Athens during the 6th Century BCE, when the disparity of wealth between the rich and the poor had become so extreme that the city-state was in a dangerous condition. Talk of violent revolt was being stoked in a pressure cooker of societal unrest. Wealthy persons were angry at the brazen challenge to their privileges and property, so they prepared to defend their interests and assets by force.

Moderating factions sensibly chose to give Solon, a wise and reasonable statesman and lawmaker, the power to make extensive reforms, and he made a number of eminently fair changes in the Greek political system and its economy. He gave power to the common people to elect officials, and to call their representatives to account. He basically created a new code of laws that replaced the draconian laws that the legislator Draco had established in Athens in its first written code of laws in history. Because of all the reforms he made, laying the foundations for Athenian democracy, Solon is considered to be an epically responsible father of good democratic governance.

In reaction to Solon's reforms, "The rich protested that his measures were outright confiscation; the radicals complained that he had not divided the land; but within a generation almost all agreed that his reforms had saved Athens from revolution." So declared Will and Ariel Durant in their thought-provoking book *The Lessons of History*. I love this concise 100-page book because it contains a distillation of insights the Durants had gained from studying history for decades, while writing eleven epic volumes on world history.

Today, glaring inequalities afflict the people in the United States, and disparities in wealth between the rich and the poor have reached new modern extremes. Joseph Stiglitz makes it perfectly clear in his incisive book *The Price of Inequality* how economically foolish and socially counterproductive this failing of our winner-take-all capitalist economic system is becoming -- and how pathologically harmful and amoral.

As a result of the current deep levels of inequalities -- and morphing into much worse with the pandemic -- our nation is now in a tinderbox condition. We are confronted with two possible outcomes: Either first, to have the middle class and poor people fall into increasingly desperate states of insecurity because we continue to allow the well-being of the majority to be undermined by the perpetuation of regressive taxation schemes and the imposition of austerity measures. This would compel our leaders to embark on new repressive measures and incarcerate more people in prisons to suppress the growing outrage over this degree of social unfairness and the increasing desperation of the bottom half of the populace. Alternatively, behind door #2, to compromise together to make our society truly fairer by instituting dramatic structural change, together with a more steeply graduated tax system so that more money would be available to improve our healthcare system and finance education, and broaden opportunity, and reduce racial inequities, and implement other programs that improve true justice and social cohesion.

The first course of action would likely lead to people eventually taking to the streets in revolt, and would have unaffordably high costs -- and would likely bring our historic experiment in democratic governance to a sad and pathetic end. So the second course of action obviously seems to be the best plan, by far.

The lessons of history teach us that the most sensible plan would be to choose wise leaders who would make smart, decent and equitable reforms. Those who do not heed the lessons of history are said to be more likely to

be doomed to repeat existential errors, so let's heed the lessons! Everyone should recognize the risks Aristotle referred to in his astute observation, "Poverty is the parent of revolution and crime."

Thomas Jefferson wrote these wise and thought-provoking words: "I know no safe depository of the ultimate powers of society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it away from them but to inform their discretion by education. This is the true corrective of abuses of Constitutional power." And certainly, it would be propitious to get rid of leaders who fool us, and who congenitally lie to us and twist the truth, and especially those who drive divisive wedges between us to get money and gain, maintain and abuse power and control.

We should make bigger investments in our children and their future -- in universal healthcare and physical wellness, and in better and more affordable public education, notable for its reasonably liberal curricula. More money should be devoted to making communities healthier in both rural and urban areas, and to improving physical infrastructure, and in science innovation and smartly focused research and development.

I myself have never had any children, but this personal fact does not diminish the clarity with which I see the right-mindedness of a marked shift toward fairer and more sensible national priorities.

> "In the nineteenth century, anti-capitalist critics like Karl Marx insisted that economics must be contained within an ethical context; they contended that social justice counted for more than industrial efficiency or private profit. In the late twentieth century, the environmental movement tried to teach us that both economics and ethics must be contained within an ecological context."
>
> --- *The Voice of the Earth, An Exploration of Ecopsychology,* Theodore Roszak, 2002

A Spiritual Take on Our Society Today

> Imagination, *n.* A warehouse of facts, with poet and liar in joint custody.
>
> --- Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary*

Virgil, the famed Roman poet of antiquity, once provocatively declared: "We make our destinies by the gods we choose." Think about this. We surely should choose gods that are propitious to the greater good, gods that help us advance positive directions in our lives and our societies. A God that elevates responsible stewardship of Earth's natural resources to a top priority would be a better God to worship than one that urges people to dominate, subjugate and exploit life on Earth without consideration for the harmful impacts these activities have on the foundations of human and biotic well-being.

Mark Twain made some interesting observations about gods in a sequel that he started to his great novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.* Curiously, he had written 15,000 words of this sequel in 1885, and then stopped right in the middle of a sentence, and never resumed work on it. In the pages he penned, he imagined the religion of Native Americans to be eminently sensible. Huck remarked about one of the novel's protagonists:

> "He said Injuns hadn't only but two Gods, a good one and a bad one, and they never paid no attention to the good one, nor ever prayed to him or worried about him at all, but only tried their level best to flatter up the bad god and keep on the good side of him; because the good one loved them and wouldn't ever think of doing them any harm, and so there warn't any occasion to be bothering about him with prayers and things, because he was always doing the very best he could for them, anyway, and prayers couldn't better it; but all the trouble come from the bad god, who was sitting up nights to think up ways to bring them bad luck and bust up all their plans, and never fooled away a chance to do them all the harm he could; and so the sensible thing was to keep praying and fussing around him all the time, and get him to let up."

There is considerable risk in focusing on the worst elements of human nature rather than the better ones. If we pander to people who exhibit vices like gluttony, unempathetic hubris and overly selfish greed, and give inadequate respect to virtues like honorable honesty, fair-mindedness and bold commitments to advance the common good, then our societies may figuratively go to hell. If we pay attention only to our heads, and ignore our hearts, then adversities and negative outcomes are more probable. If we let the analytical left hemispheres of our brains obtusely dominate our intuitive right hemispheres, the values we hold will likely be wrong-headed.

It would be a better idea to cultivate nobler and fairer principles, and to strive to make our relationships and societies healthier, rather than retreating into tribal affiliations, ignorance and denial. And we should not allow our societies to be driven by fear, anger or control-obsessed conservatives. It is most desirable for the majority of people to have faith in right things, and not faith in literal interpretations of Creation stories or misguided economic doctrines. "Fear Builds Walls", as they say, and this is true even with regard to biological effects of hormones on the human brain. In contrast, hope, positivity and fairness forge closer connections.

People everywhere should be free to believe in whatever God they like, and they should be guaranteed this freedom. There should also be a robust separation of church authority and the government, for the simple reason that too many abuses of power by repressive regimes have been perpetrated throughout the course of history by means of unholy alliances between political authorities and religious authorities. Just ask anyone who lives in Iran or Saudi Arabia today -- or Turkey or Russia!

Jesus was a messianic preacher in ancient Palestine who criticized both the moneychangers and the priestly aristocracy in Jerusalem during his life and times. He also courageously opposed the ruthless Roman military occupation of his homeland. It is thus ironic that fundamentalist faithful folks in the Religious Right stand in staunch opposition to measures that would make our society more inclusive and equitable.

The fascinating evolutionary roots of religion and ethics in prehistoric human clans are explored in *Revelations of a Modern Prophet*. A relevant part to understand here is that overarching positive principles could provide us the best hope to deal fairly, honestly and effectively with the daunting challenges that humanity face today.

> "Look at it this way. If we worship Mammon and regard money as the most important thing in life, and allow a small group of rich people to grab the biggest share of the monetary gains generated by the exploitation of the Earth's resources, this poor priority will make us a much different people than if instead we were to extol virtues of greater social fairness and environmental justice, and commit our nation to an overarching fair-minded Bill of Rights for Future Generations."
>
> -- *Huckleberry Finn, the Forty-Niner Gold Rush, and Sensational Related Reflections*

Be aware that Jesus was a revolutionary, and our Founders were Enlightenment progressives. In stark contrast, conservatives in recent times tend to be antagonistically anti-progressive. An Indiana Tea Party candidate who beat more moderate long-time Republican Senator Richard Lugar once said: "I have a mindset that says bipartisanship ought to consist of Democrats coming to the Republican point of view." This absurd, obtusely uncompromising mindset is antithetical to the commendable fairness principles upon which our nation was founded.

Many Republicans in the House of Representatives lost their positions to more extreme right-wing politicians in the 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016, 2018 and 2020 national elections. One of these relative moderates pointed out that he believed a simply fair truism: Once a candidate is elected, he or she has a duty to work across the aisle with other people who have also been elected. This is our collaborative duty. It is the only way to achieve fairer solutions to our national and global problems. This is true common sense!

The Republican quest for ideological purity has caused the last several sessions of Congress to be among the worst ever, as judged by their record low approval ratings. A main reason for this pathetic performance is the unwillingness of radically far right politicians to sensibly compromise. And once Trump got into office, he damned bipartisanship and tried to pass legislation without any input whatsoever from Democrats.

Golden Rule fairness principles should be given precedence over fervent beliefs in propagated biases, particularly when they adversely affect other people. So an honest assessment of the common good -- of everyone together -- should be made in formulating every rule, law, regulation, and spending policy. This would be a revolutionary change from designing every new plan to increase benefits for the top dogs in our society!

The highest-income earners have gained the privilege of paying the lowest tax rates since the late 1920s by abusing their influence in our political system. When we see that the human population on Earth has increased from 2 billion in 1930 to nearly 8 billion today, we can realize that the need has grown dramatically for more money to be spent on social justice initiatives, healthcare for all, environmental protections, the conservation of

natural resources, public education, sensible family planning programs, a more sound social safety net, and better plans for disaster preparedness and recovery. More spending, in other words, to create truer security.

We can no longer afford to allow political shills for rich persons to dictate tax policies that let them pay low tax rates in the face of these needs. It is a Big Lie that everyone will do better only when rich people pay low tax rates; it is a simple truism that everyone will do better only when everyone actually does better.

It is disconcerting to ponder the entire litany of harms that are being foisted onto people in future generations. To right a wrong, it is best to first understand the problem in a context that is expansive, comprehensive and accurate. Think clearly about the litany of detrimental ways we are treating the prospects of our children, and theirs, and theirs, and theirs. We are using up natural resources with profligate abandon and failing to conserve energy, mineral and water resources, and decimating wildlife habitats, destroying rainforests and damaging vital natural ecosystems. At the same time, we are allowing huge costs to be externalized, and letting corporate power rule the day rather than giving more power to the people and preserving collective bargaining rights for workers. We are spending unaffordably large amounts of money on the military and prisons, and giving very low tax rates to the highest-income earners, and financing these things by mortgaging the future with trillions of dollars of borrowed money to stimulate all these shortsighted activities.

This concatenation of expedient actions is blatantly ill advised! As Thomas Paine observed in 1776: "The present state of America is truly alarming to every person who is capable of reflection."

Thomas Paine recommended we "bring the doctrine of reconciliation to the touchstone of nature." To do so, we should admit the profound importance of healthy natural ecosystems to the well-being of humanity. Let's not deceive ourselves, and by our delay bring ruin upon our heirs in posterity.

Journalist Bill Moyers was honored with a "Global Environmental Citizen Award" by Harvard Medical School in 2004. In his acceptance speech, I once again recall, Moyers noted that when he reads the news about all the things humanity is doing in the world, he concludes that it is <u>not</u> as if "Father, forgive us, for we know not what we do." Instead, he looks at photos on his desk of his five grandchildren, and observes: "We <u>do know</u> what we are doing. We are stealing their future. Betraying their trust. Despoiling their world."

<u>The Evolution of Democracy</u>

The future of American democracy is on the line in the 2022 midterm elections, and along with it the best prospects for moderation, protected individual freedoms, reproductive rights, respect for majority rule, and indeed democracy itself, along with peaceful coexistence between hyper polarized political parties, as extremists push for a civil war.

"True patriotism", observed Eleanor Roosevelt, "springs from a belief in the dignity of the individual, freedom and equality not only for Americans but for all people on Earth, universal brotherhood and good will, and a constant and earnest striving toward the principles and ideals on which this country was founded."

Attention here now. As you read on, keep in mind George Washington's wise words in his great Farewell Address about the vital importance of unity -- and his salient warning about political factions and misplaced loyalties and the rise of a "spirit of revenge" that would enable "cunning, ambitious, and unprincipled men" to grab the reins of government and usurp and abuse power, and thereby destroy our democracy out of self-interest.

It is my strong belief that better guidance is needed to determine how to achieve optimal outcomes. Once again we can see that it would be a good idea to adopt a Bill of Rights for Future Generations to provide this guidance. This would be one of the best ways to ensure that the interests and prospects of people in the future are not mercilessly sacrificed to greed and short-term expediencies.

Sir Winston Churchill once said, "Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time."

Capitalist economic systems could likewise be said to be the worst economic systems, except for all the others. They have good advantages in motivating productivity, harnessing resources, marshalling and directing workers to produce goods, and maximizing profits. They also have big disadvantages in that they often unfairly exploit

workers, facilitate cost externalizing gambits, act without being tethered much by ethical constraints, and are myopic in their aggressive depletion of resources and ignoring of longer-term greater good goals.

Since a multitude of interest groups compete for advantages in capitalist economic systems, the greatest good can be achieved only by managing these systems well, and with maximum fairness, expansively considered. To accomplish this goal, the interests of all factions needs to be taken into account, including the interests of the long-term greater good and the social and ecological underpinnings of prosperity.

The Perspective of Dante Alighieri

In his Christian allegorical tale *The Divine Comedy,* Dante reserved the lowest places in his imagined nine circles of Hell for those who commit conscious acts of fraud or treachery against others. He regarded the worst form of treachery to be cold-hearted exploitation of family, country, friends, guests, or benefactors. He judged treachery that had the most adverse consequences in history to be the worst of all sins. Deceivers, oppressors, duplicitous hypocrites, corrupt politicians, scam artists and others who perpetrate cunning frauds can be seen today to be exceeded by a new modern form of treachery -- one that exerts its influence on a more far-reaching scale. All of us are participating in this new type of treachery -- the exploitation and defrauding of vulnerable young people and everyone in the future by means of the above-summarized litany of harms.

It has become increasingly clear in recent decades that there is a sweeping ecological extent to which all actions are interconnected, so the exploitive undermining of the prospects of people in future generations for purposes that are selfishly shortsighted is egregious beyond all other forms of folly and treachery. Bold and sensible steps should be taken to correct this state of affairs!

Dante imagined that a silver key of repentance is needed to unlock the gates of hope, together with a gold key of reconciliation. These keys to *Purgatorio* were seen as necessary for a seeker to embark on a providential path of redemption, transformation and positive change. Repent! Let's reconcile!!

Humility was regarded as the greatest virtue in medieval times, and pride was seen as the root of all sins because it contributed to our missing the mark and falling short of the ideal that a Buddhist would describe as "right relationship". I believe we can integrate the head and the heart better, and achieve a wiser balance by seeking common ground and honestly working to fairly reconcile the political right and the left.

A Salubrious Vision of More Sensible Values

Constraints necessitated by the coronavirus pandemic have caused countless numbers of people to become much more viscerally aware and appreciative of the outdoors, and of the natural world, and of open spaces and parks in proximity. This dose of awareness and appreciation should expand into stronger support for protections of public lands and the environmental commons, and particularly of National Parks, Wilderness Areas, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Marine Protected Areas and Wildlife Refuges. And such conservation-minded conceptions should naturally be accompanied by a growing respect for the whole host of plans and priorities that are most consistent with the *Common Good, Properly Understood.*

Fairer consideration of the legacy we are leaving to all our heirs in future generations is a principal theme of the observations contained in this Common Sense Revival. We can see, right here and now, that we're distinctly "missing the mark" in our societies in a disturbing litany of ways (a true sin!). Throughout this manifesto, extensive details of how we are failing to do the right thing are explored, with a light toward identifying and putting into effect significantly saner and more salubrious plans of action.

We have been painting ourselves into an ever-more constricted corner, in a gaudy miasma of clashing colors, by incurring record levels of national debt year after year. This is folly. Many far-reaching challenges lie ahead as the third decade of 21st century unfolds, and extraordinarily large amounts of money will be needed to deal adequately with them. (These words were written before COVID-19 spread onto the scene). We can no longer afford to continue adding to the national debt every year to finance "routine" on-going needs like extravagant costs related to the military, wars, Homeland Security, high cost Medicare drugs, and unnecessarily expensive medical procedures for people in the last months of their lives. We can't afford to continue borrowing money to

give historically low tax rates to those with the highest levels of incomes, or to continue giving big corporations and investors absurdly generous tax breaks, subsidies, regulatory loopholes and allowed cost externalities.

I hope readers will give impartial attention to all the issues examined in these essays. Ambrose Bierce defined "impartial" in *The Devil's Dictionary* as "Unable to perceive any promise of personal advantage from espousing either side of a controversy, or of adopting either of two conflicting opinions." Ha! Let's objectively set aside all biases associated with our own personal vantage points for a moment, and instead focus on a fair evaluation of the overall advantages for humanity in the pursuit of saner collective undertakings, considered from the point of view of the legacy we will leave to our descendants in the future. Let's consider the long-term impact of our actions, in other words, and think and feel in the biggest picture perspectives.

Introspection into Inequality

The conclusion reached in this Common Sense Revival at the time it was first published before the November 2012 national elections, was that our country would be best served by choosing to re-elect President Obama, and to simultaneously choose moderate politicians in all Congressional races; and that, after the election, we should demand that all our representatives work together to make our country a fairer and more fiscally-sound nation, and a world leader in resource conservation and cleaner renewable energy alternatives and the promotion of ecological precautionary principles.

Robert Reich, the Secretary of Labor under President Bill Clinton, is a political economist who is one of the most honorable progressive voices on the American scene. His incisive perspectives are the subject of an insightful eye-opening film titled *Inequality for All* that received standing ovations when it was shown in January 2013 at the Sundance Film Festival in Park City, Utah, where it won top recognition for excellence in documentary filmmaking. Robert Reich and the producers of *Inequality for All* deserve congratulations for having created a valuable film. I highly recommend that everyone watch it. Shame on the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences for not having given this important film the recognition and visibility of a deserved Oscar nomination!

Professor Reich cogently explains the extent to which economic inequality hurts people and society as a whole, and the degree to which inequality undermines people's ability to fairly pursue happiness and well-being in their lives. Bob, as he is known to his friends, hearteningly expressed optimism about our collective ability to make the USA relatively more equitable for all. It is an encouraging idea that the prospects are good for us to reform our economic and political systems, and to really make our nation a much fairer one. Optimism and positive vision, after all, can help us be more effective in achieving goals consistent with the greater good. Perhaps such perspective could inoculate us against the propaganda and narrow crony favoritism that are contributing to making the U.S. policies so anti-egalitarian. Positive attitudes can provide us with a powerful impetus to rectify our distorted national priorities by understanding the challenging specific ways that we are insensibly allowing narrowly-focused interest groups to wrongheadedly determine these priorities.

An unexpectedly effective use of a simple visual aid is employed in the film *Inequality for All*. A graph that charts trends in income inequality over the past century in the U.S. is superimposed over a graphic depiction of a suspension bridge similar to the beautiful iconic Golden Gate Bridge. A steep increase in income inequality over the decade of the Roaring Twenties corresponds to the rise of the bridge's cables from one end of their anchorage to the top of the first suspension tower. Then, as income inequality diminished from 1930 through 1980, the graph follows the bridge's suspension cables downward toward mid-span, corresponding to a decline in economic disparities between people that resulted from public policies designed to create broader prosperity and a stronger middle class through a New Deal social safety net. Then, beginning with the increasingly unfair public policies instituted by Ronald Reagan, a new episode of narrowly concentrated wealth has traced a trajectory upwards until it is reaching a new peak near the bridge's second tower.

Symbolically, the cables that lead back down to their second safe anchorage provide good hope that we will once again find the intellectual clarity and political will to implement fairer public policies that will emphasize a more stable and sustainable future. Such a broad-minded approach would represent the greater good for all.

The Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz echoes and amplifies understandings similar to the ones

articulated by Robert Reich. In Stiglitz' important book, *The Price of Inequality: How Today's Divided Society Endangers Our Future*, he makes it abundantly clear that, in recent decades, broad inequities in the U.S. have been made much worse. He posited in this 2012 book that the reason for this is a pathetic one: because our political system is structured to be "of the 1%, for the 1%, by the 1%". Joseph Stiglitz makes many compelling observations about the true nature of exorbitant costs associated with extreme social inequalities in human societies, and provides a convincing analysis of the failings of our economic and political systems. He also proposes an auspicious variety of wiser ways forward.

Stiglitz points out that our economic system is too unstable and inefficient, and that it periodically creates too much unemployment and too many inequities. Since our economic and political systems are having the effect of concentrating wealth at the top, the populace as a whole is being adversely affected in many ways. Our systems facilitate the foisting of a wide range of healthcare costs and environmental harms onto society, mainly so that businesses can maximize their profits in the short run. This causes harm to millions of workers, consumers and citizens. Associated damages to natural ecosystems are undermining the foundations upon which our overall well-being depends, now and in the future. By allowing such developments, we are also harming the health and survival prospects of millions of other species of life. Let's be honestly pro-life!

Extreme inequality is one aspect of the intense class struggles that motivated Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx in 1848 to write their notorious and ideologically exploited *Communist Manifesto*. These famous early "worldly philosophers" described a "spectre" of worker exploitation and class warfare that was haunting industrial capitalist societies, and they examined the morbid manifestations associated with the inequities involved and the unmitigated social ills of early industrial activities.

Wealthy investor Warren Buffet declared in 2006: "There's class warfare, all right, but it's my class, the rich class, that's making war, and we're winning." Five years later, he added: "Through the tax code, there has been class warfare waged, and my class has won. It's been a rout." I have always personally admired a good quality of magnanimity in winners, and felt a contrasting degree of umbrage toward those who exhibit jealously mean-spirited or excessively greedy or prideful hubristic self-satisfaction when they triumph. Smugly narcissistic gloating and excessive self-congratulations are small-minded, and not a pretty thing, and often tend to manifest themselves in unacceptably consequentially harmful ways.

I strongly believe that we can and should create fairer and more sensible civilizations, and this Common Sense Revival helps identify excellent ways that this can be accomplished. Throw Mitch McConnell out of office!

When Thomas Paine urged American colonists to seek independence from despotic British rule, he declared: "The Sun never shined on a cause of greater worth. 'Tis not the concern of a day, a year, or an age; posterity are virtually involved in the contest, and will be more or less affected even to the end of time, by the proceedings now. Now is the seed-time of Continental union, faith and honor. The least fracture now will be like a name engraved with the point of a pin on the tender rind of a young oak; the wound would enlarge with the tree, and posterity read in it full grown characters." An image arises of people in posterity sitting in real rueful judgment of our obtusely selfish, antagonized, ideological and shortsighted follies today.

Virtuous Economic Circles versus Vicious Economic Circles

One thing that makes an economy stable and prosperous is a strong and vibrant middle class. In the three prosperous decades after World War II, the biggest and best-educated middle class in the world was created by means of initiatives like the G.I. Bill and investments in the expansion of public universities, and the empowerment of labor unions to give workers more bargaining power. The basic compact at the heart of the American economy was that employers rewarded productivity increases and paid their workers enough for hard work to buy the products American employers were selling. That basic bargain created a "virtuous circle" of higher living standards, more jobs, better wages, and more inclusive prosperity.

Robert Reich visually describes this provocative example of a virtuous circle in the film *Inequality for All*. When productivity grows in businesses, then profits and wages increase, and workers buy more, companies hire more, tax revenues increase, governments invest more, and workers are better educated. In distinct contrast,

a "vicious circle" can be created in which there is a downward spiral because the middle class doesn't share in economic gains. As their wages stagnate, a vicious circle begins in which workers buy less, companies downsize, unemployment rises, tax revenues decline, budget deficits grow, government investments and programs are cut, and citizens and workers are not educated as well as they should be.

The contrast between the outcomes of virtuous circles and vicious circles is one of the grandest conceptions clearly conveyed in *Inequality for All.* Note that virtuous circles and vicious circles refer to complex chains of events that reinforce themselves through feedback loops. A virtuous circle has favorable results, while vicious circles tend to have the unintended consequence of producing outcomes that are generally detrimental to the majority and to society and humanity as a whole.

The wealthiest 1% of Americans simply cannot consume enough, no matter how hard they try, to generate the economic stimulus that a more affluent middle class could. The secret to a stronger economy is to invest in education and to increase household incomes with a decent minimum wage, higher pay for overtime work, and stronger unions, and to raise skill levels, thereby generating sustained consumer demand. Strong economies like Germany's pursue such virtuous circle policies. In Germany, workers are highly skilled and well educated, and collective bargaining rights are protected, and the middle class has money to spend -- and they also have significantly more leisure time than American workers, a factor that helps enjoy them a better quality of life.

In contrast, falling real wages during a vicious circle undermines consumer demand, and this leads to shrinking output and higher rates of joblessness. Such trends make the economy fragile, and they boost social instability. When the middle class is skating on thin ice, and jobs offer low wages and poor benefits, the prospects for all are diminished. The devious "trickle-down" narrative repetitiously spoon-fed to the middle class and working class folks in America is simply not true. "Post-truth" deceptions cannot override reality.

When wealth is too heavily concentrated in the hands of few, the amount spent on public schools, vital physical infrastructure and social programs is cut, and stresses intensify. Too many people end up without an adequate education, and millions of people work long hours and do not have enough money to spend, and have little leisure time, so they have a lesser quality of life. When riches gush up into the hands of a monopolizing few, hardships cascade down. Politicians who push such an agenda for their own selfish advantages are socially deplorable.

Increases in social stresses make people more vulnerable to ill health, mental depression, drug overdoses, and violence. The bane of a poorly controlled pandemic, heightened inequalities and more people living in poverty and desperate circumstances are among the most serious of these stresses. The negative effects of stress are a biological fact; even trees subjected to increased stresses like drought, acid rain or forest fragmentation become increasingly vulnerable to diseases like Sudden Oak Death, or to lethal insect infestations like those by mountain pine beetles. In recognizing this, we should act to reduce the health and financial stress that the majority of Americans face.

Author Naomi Wolf asked Robert Reich what three policy prescriptions he would give to an American president and Congress. Professor Reich replied that we should return to what was done successfully in the 35 years after World War II, when prosperity was more broadly shared. Specifically, he indicated that we should make larger investments in public education, including in higher education, and in physical infrastructure, and these initiatives should be funded by a smarter, fairer and more progressive system of taxation. Excellent ideas!

I just used the word "deplorable" with awareness to its supercharged connotations. Certainly a contributing factor to Hillary Clinton's 2016 election loss was her characterization of Trump supporters as "deplorables." This accusation was a big mistake, for it motivated conservatives to turn out to oppose her, and of course it can be said that there are some "fine people" on both sides of the amped up tribal divide. However, the act itself of supporting Trump today in 2022 is certainly deeply deplorable and lamentable, and deserving of strong condemnation, by any objective assessment. Just look at Trump's self-serving con man agenda, his deadly politicizing of health safety measures during the pandemic, his devious twisting of the truth, his big lie about the 2020 election, his incitement of the January 6 insurrection, and his financial corruption, democracy-undermining ploys, racist rhetoric, discriminatory policies, harmful divide-to-conquer tactics, fatuously demented beliefs, scandalous behaviors, political malfeasance, self-dealing, efforts to wrongfully politicize

science and silence experts, misuses of pardon power, history of tax evasion, egregious violations of propriety and the rule of law, and treachery against the best interests of women, Blacks, Latinos and the poor. Look at his despotic abuses of power, and unconstitutional evasions of the checks and balances in government that were designed to assure transparency and oversight to protect people from abuses of authority by holding transgressors appropriately accountable for misdeeds. These unethically immoral traits are made worse by his betrayals of allies in cozying up to foreign power-abusing autocrats, and by cruel policies that separated immigrant and refugee children from their parents, and by his extreme lack of fiscal, social and environmental responsibility that constitute a betrayal of all persons in future generations. A reckoning is due for these gross betrayals of the public trust.

Economics as a Morality Play

There are influential motives for portraying economics as a morality play, and for making this a tale of excesses and their consequences. "We lived beyond our means, the story goes, and now we're paying the inevitable price. Economists can explain ad nauseam that this is wrong, that the reason we have mass unemployment isn't that we spent too much in the past, but that we're spending too little now, and that this problem can and should be solved. No matter; many people have a visceral sense that we have sinned and must seek redemption through suffering -- and neither economic argument nor the observation that the people now suffering are not at all the same people who sinned during the bubble years makes much of a dent."

While it is erroneous to regard economic activities as a morality play in this way, there is another sense in which work activities themselves can be regarded as a morality play, and the judgment in this is clear: the 1% of people who largely control the economic system are acting like bad guys. The fact of the matter is that the agenda of those who advocate austerity policies looks a lot like a simple expression of upper class preferences wrapped in a facade of academic rigor. "What the top 1% wants becomes what economic science says we must do." And, "it's not just a matter of emotion versus logic. You can't understand the influence of austerity doctrine without talking about class and inequality."

In *Inequality for All,* Robert Reich cogently examines the deep inequities and adverse effects of rising economic inequality in America. Middle class wages, it is revealed, actually dropped in the economic recovery from 2009 to 2012, while the top 1% of people reaped 95% of the gains made. Professor Reich expresses heartening optimism that, by working together, Americans could change this undesirable dynamic. We succeeded in doing this between 1930 and 1980, so we can do it again today! From this standpoint, it is surely a disastrous mistake for the American people to have allowed Trump, Pence and McConnell to have hubristically grabbed power.

Emmanuel Saez, a French economist and Professor of Economics at UC Berkeley, has confirmed this fact that the richest 1% of Americans made almost all the gains in the economic recovery after the 2008 economic crisis, and that middle class wages in effect fell, on a real inflation-adjusted basis. Inequality of this magnitude is "poisoning our society and making a mockery of the American dream of equal opportunity," Professor Saez says. He recommends higher taxes on rich people, with marginal federal tax rates on the highest levels of income of at least 70%, like they were every year from 1936 to 1980.

Economic strategies that would help create good jobs and more widespread prosperity would be better than current strategies designed mainly to increase corporate profits and stock prices in the short run. Such better plans include providing better education by making it more affordable and more accountable for improved outcomes; eliminating payroll taxes on the first $15,000 of income; raising the cap on income subject to payroll taxes; giving workers more bargaining power; increasing the federal minimum wage; making workplaces fairer for women and paying them equal amounts for the same work; creating a safer and more stable economic system; and reducing the risks and costs of bank bailouts by reducing the multiples of leverage allowed.

Extreme levels of income inequality represent a new kind of "inconvenient truth", to use the term Al Gore employed with regard to the risks of global warming. This new inconvenient truth reveals the dark side of unfairness in our econopolitical system, and its negative impacts on poor people and the middle class.

Political Aside – Agitated Emotions and Crucial Understandings

Many Americans regard people in either the Democratic Party or the Republican Party as being traitorous to the country. We have become victims of divide-to-conquer politicians, and must now throw off the perverse despotism of their manipulative power by rightly joining together in common cause to demand sensible reforms within BOTH parties, so that we will succeed in honestly and honorably making our government "of the people, by the people, and for the people". This will propitiously have the collateral benefit of helping assure those in future years that the legacy we leave them will not be one of overly dystopian consequences. Ominous images impinge on our consciousness -- and lives.

We should demand that our political representatives strive to create greater fairness in our society, and work to create foundations for peaceable coexistence that are conducive to cooperative collaboration and the vitally positive quality of social cohesion.

It is critically important that we see accurately -- and vote accordingly -- for the safety, security, prosperity, freedom, happiness, environmental justice, sustainability and sanity of *We the People.*

As our global population continues to increase by more than 80 million babies every year, the signs are becoming startlingly clear that we are exceeding the carrying capacity of our home planet for our kind. We are using up resources and polluting the atmosphere, and our activities in aggregate are destabilizing the global climate. We must take bold steps to alter this risk-laden state of affairs.

Many imbalances are involved in our carrying capacity conundrum in a world of finite limits, and to begin to rectify them, and in the interests of advancing the greater good, the least measure we must take is to have the responsible forbearance NOT TO FORCE PREGNANT WOMEN TO DELIVER AGAINST THEIR WILLS, REGARDLESS OF THE CIRCUMSTANCES.

It is trespassingly wrong to treat every woman who becomes pregnant like a forced labor inmate in a baby-delivering prison camp under the dictate of cocky politicians.

~ Freedom, brothers!
~~ Equality, compatriots!
~~~ Peace, fellow countrypersons!
~~~~ RESPECT, soulfully croons Aretha …

<u>Stop the Steal - REALLY</u>

Those who blindly believe the election lies that say Trump won the 2020 election (which he lost by 7 million votes) are engaging in defensive psychological projection, claiming that Democrats are extremists and cheaters in elections despite the evidence overwhelmingly pointing to the fact that the 2020 elections were free, fair and secure. As a matter of contrasting fact, the political system in the U.S. is radically rigged against Democrats, where Republicans in red states have created extreme gerrymanders that disenfranchise millions of people, and the conservative news media and targeted propaganda on social media sites gives Republicans excessive influence that is neither merited nor desirable for the freedom and well-being of the populace.

Wisconsin is one of the worst states for having outrageously gerrymandered districts that give Republicans near supermajority influence in the state legislature even though the electorate leans about half Democratic and half Republican. *The Wisconsin GOP is showing us how stealing state elections is done,* Ja'han Jones wrote in late 2021, and Wisconsin's Supreme Court is egregiously "helping Republicans keep gerrymandering maps that will solidify Republican control for a decade."

Republicans in many states are using cunningly manipulative lies about election fraud to devastating effect to restrict voting rights to help them win elections, with one cynical motive being "to own the libs". But look who really gets "owned" as a terrible result of Republicans succeeding in deceiving people and scaring them and fooling them into blaming Democrats, when the fault for the dire state of problems is largely of their own making through their compulsive pandering to the rich, giant corporations and right-wing Christian nationalists.

Those who get "owned" include: (1) Women who are subjected to heinous treatment as victims of forced birther politicians who take away one of the most consequential of all rights — that of the freedom to make their own

decisions with doctors in matters of their health, well-being, safety, bodily autonomy and destiny. (2) Everyone that is not well-to-do, due to reactionary shills for the wealthy pushing a deceitful and harm-engendering agenda of regressive tax cuts, austerity measures to shred social safety net programs and on-going national debt swindles. (3) those who honorably stand for responsible climate action and protections of the public lands, Wilderness Areas, the environmental commons and endangered species. (4) Dreamers, immigrants and desperate refugees whose hopes and dreams for safety and opportunity are crushed under the iron heel of antagonistic fear-mongering and scapegoating by demagogues, liars, hypocrites and charlatans. (5) Poor people and desperate people and the homeless whose problems are made insufferably worse by "conservative" strategies that lead to increased inequalities and injustices that are part and parcel of the right-wing agenda. (6) Decency, respectable moderation and truth itself, as devious politicians weaponize lies and fears to impose reactionary social engineering measures on the populace. And, (7) Safety and stability, as red state politicians work to create chaos in elections and reduce accountability for abuses of power, and compound this by using repressive police forces and harsh incarceration policies to enforce increasingly draconian laws that are passed to protect wealthy people from the discontents of the disenfranchised and the unnecessarily oppressed. Stop the steal through reforms!

Cries for Secession

In the immediate aftermath of the 2012 national elections, some folks in "red states" had a temper tantrum about President Obama's victory and declared they wanted to secede from the Union. After the 2016 elections, people in blue states responded with similar feelings. The red state reaction was especially interesting because of the fact that most of the people afflicted with secession fervor in red states ironically receive much more in benefits from the federal government, on average, than they pay in taxes. The balance is the opposite in blue states, which pay more in total to the federal government than they get in return. If people in relatively poor states like Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Tennessee, and West Virginia were allowed to secede, Dana Milbank asserted that this "Confederacy of Takers" would face serious fiscal problems, and the remaining "Union of the Makers" would be financially better off. "Would-be rebels from the red states should keep in mind during the coming budget battle," Milbank stated, "that those who are most ardent about cutting federal government spending tend to come from parts of the country that most rely on it."

Perhaps we should actually have let those red states secede, and see if they become paragons of economic, social and environmental health -- or, more likely, unmitigated disasters! "Let them take their inequities, unfair social policies, anti-immigrant fervor, anti-environmentalism, latent and overt racism, and enthusiasms for guns, harsh justice and the death penalty, and try to manage their republic according to these narrow ideologies without the net benefits they receive from the federal government. It is likely that circumstances would prove, in coming years, that it is a delusion to think that fundamentalist doctrines are better than fairer understandings, sensibly balanced priorities and a stronger democracy. The experience in Kansas of the then governor Sam Brownback slashing taxes in 2012 to benefit high-income folks proved definitively that ideology, divorced from reality, can be disastrous for the people."

Ponder the psychological underpinnings of the legend-like myth that says there are two kinds of people in the world, the Makers and the Takers. The Makers are portrayed like heroic individualists in an Ayn Rand novel; they create wealth and jobs in a nobly virtuous struggle against workers and onerous government regulations. This myth contemptuously treats workers as Takers who want good compensation and benefits for their labors and expect a social safety net in hard times. It basically says workers are parasites on heroic job creators. Entrepreneurs, financiers, CEOs and inventors are regarded as Makers, while workers are seen as Takers who are lazy and want more than anything not to work so hard, and to collect undeserved wages, unemployment benefits or food stamps.

Right-wing pundit Ann Coulter was extremely discouraged at the outcome of the national elections in Nov. 2012. She declared, "If Mitt Romney cannot win in this economy, then the tipping point has been reached. We have more takers than makers and it's over. There is no hope." Ann Coulter was completely off base about this. Her convictions were stubbornly ideological, and they should have yielded to more balanced points of view! There is much hope for our country, but to actually realize these hopes, a reasonable opposition party is needed in our

two-party political system, a Party that is fair-minded rather than one that panders to the rich and is radically uncompromising, dogmatic, hyper-partisan, dishonest, self-righteous, fear mongering, and prone to the use of "hostage-taking tactics".

A political cartoon in the newspaper in November 2012 showed an angry white man wearing a T-shirt that read SECESSION and toting a gun, and he was pointing to a barbed-wire border crossing. There, a sign read: NOW ENTERIN' ANGRYWHITEMENISTAN. The disheveled guy in the cartoon is singing the virtues of this new confederacy, telling a skeptical Uncle Sam, "It's full up of freedom-lovers just like me, and it's gonna be paradise." No civil war is necessary over this issue!

The 2012 secession hoopla died down pretty quickly, but the anger of conservatives over hot button social issues continues to boil, especially as conflicts intensify over healthcare, contraception, abortion, marriage equality, immigration, racism, voting rights, democracy, gun safety measures international trade policies and both Islamic and domestic extremism. A psychologist might analyze the collective yowl of secession fervor as a mixture of anger, humiliated frustration and self-righteous indignation at being defeated and not getting their way. This anger persists, simmering in fervor over hot button issues and misguided misunderstanding of the depths to which reactionary movements are exploited by moneyed interests to inimically advance a narrow, inequitable and anti-democratic concentration of wealth in the hands of the few.

Policies that amplify unfairness and increase concentrations of wealth in the hands of the few have another malign tendency: to concentrate power more narrowly and rigidly. It is a convenience for the rich to be able to use the growing influence of their increasing wealth to skew our national priorities, but since this trend is so contrary to our nation's best interests, apologists for such outcomes are distinctly misguided! National policies that exacerbate inequities are creating anti-egalitarian feedback loops that threaten our future well-being -- and that of our children and grandchildren. They also threaten the soundness of our economy and the health of natural ecosystems, despite the fact that these are a bedrock of all future prosperity, flourishing and survival.

The radical right had a scary presence in Dallas in 1963 when President John Kennedy was assassinated. Many Texans called Kennedy a traitor at that time. Today, the radical right has grown into a national presence, as one observer pointed out in newspapers as the 50th anniversary of JFK's assassination approached. After likening vituperative talk by the radical right to a hothouse, the observer wrote: "It's what occurs when a handful of people hijack the microphone, turn up the volume, and push away from the center to the point where the fabric appears to break and hysteria and fanaticism takes root." Trump has mined this vein with maniacal fervor. Safe harbors are under threat, and political violence has been spiking in the past five years.

Let's be reasonable, folks, and remember the Enlightenment Era principles upon which our great nation was founded. And let's appreciate the wisdom and Golden Rule fairness of the progressive evolution that has taken place in the last two centuries in many arenas.

<u>The Consequences of Austerity</u>

Austerity programs generally contribute to a vicious circle, so they make particularly poor sense when economic activities are faltering. When hyper-stimulative economic policies and a deregulation of financial markets and excessive speculation created an economic bubble in real estate in 2007, the bubble was unstable and it eventually burst. This created a financial crisis and subsequent economic recession and rapidly mounting debt that countries worldwide have been struggling to emerge from ever since. This imprudence made us pathetically poorly prepared when emergency pandemic needs suddenly arose.

I believe it's a good idea to honestly evaluate both sides of any argument. This helps in being able to objectively determine the best courses of action. We should keep in mind, however, that both sides of an argument are not equally valid. Reasonable considerations of probable consequences can make it clear which point of view is most accurate. And we should realize that there is no correlation between the size of a megaphone that amplifies a position and the validity of the perspective it expresses. Likewise, there is no positive correlation between the intensity of feeling revealed in an unhinged tweet storm and common sense, or demented rantings by Trump on the White House coronavirus briefing stage in 2020 and public health. "Don't drink poisonous disinfectants!"

Legitimate disagreements exist over every hotly contested issue. Opposing viewpoints tend to generate a fog of reasonable-sounding arguments for their particular points of view. Since we are in a Bet Situation and must choose which course to chart, it is important to develop a good way to decide what national policies should be pursued and the priorities that should be given to them.

How can we best make such determinations in the heat of the contest? A good answer to this question can be found in the moral philosophy of *consequentialism*. This philosophical theory asserts a simple value, that the real consequences of any given course of action are the ultimate basis for judgments about its relative rightness or wrongness. Thus, the degree of positive or negative outcomes associated with any policy choice is the true measure of the legitimacy of all arguments for it or against it. To find clarity, the best way to assess an argument concerning a given course of action is by honestly evaluating the probable consequences of taking the action -- or of not taking the action.

"Every conflict is one between different angles of vision, illuminating the same truth."

--- Mahatma Gandhi

I reckon that one of the biggest disputes since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution concerns the proper prerogatives of capital versus those of labor. Monumental edifices of ideology have become accreted around this conflict between moneyed classes and working people. This strife was one of the basic issues in the costly global struggle between capitalism and communism during the Cold War. Many wars have been fought as a result of this strife between factions seeking to triumph in the competition for money, status and power.

Theodore Roosevelt declared in 1910 that contentious strife between Capital and Labor was a "conflict between the men who possess more than they have earned and the men who have earned more than they possess." He added that this is "a struggle of freemen to gain and hold the right of self-government as against the special interests who twist the methods of free government into machinery for defeating the popular will." Yikes! This struggle began intensifying in 2016 with twittering Trump rudely grabbing the megaphone, and abusing its use.

Roosevelt spoke those words in a speech titled *The New Nationalism*. He provocatively added: "At every stage, and under all circumstances, the essence of the struggle is to equalize opportunity, destroy unfair privilege, and give to the life and citizenship of every individual the highest possible value both to himself and to the commonwealth." … "I stand for the square deal. But when I say that I am for the square deal, I mean not merely that I stand for fair play under the present rules of the games, but that I stand for having those rules changed so as to work for a more substantial equality of opportunity and of reward for equally good service."

Today, seeing that the concentration of wealth in the hands of the richest 1% of Americans has reached one of the most extreme levels ever, we should snap to alert attention. See here now! The dangers inherent in rash degrees of health and wealth inequalities should provoke us into taking remedial action, for otherwise economic and social turmoil will intensify, and the potential for human suffering will become exacerbated. This is the basic reason that Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis made the sensational observation that Americans have a stark choice between either democracy or wealth concentrated in the hands of the few.

Public policies are contrary to the common good when they significantly increase inequalities and injustices and the concentration of wealth and power. Trickle-down theory rationalizes economic policies that give most of the benefits of economic activities to the people who are already most financially well off. Forty years of statistics reveal that regressive changes in national tax policies made since 1980 have resulted in a deteriorating financial well-being of a vast majority of Americans, and a more inequitable concentration of wealth. Professor Robert Reich succinctly states an added problem with this: "Liberals are concerned about the concentration of wealth because it almost inevitably leads to a concentration of power that undermines democracy." This is happening right now. To rectify this problem, we need expanded voting rights, an end to gerrymandering, and a constitutional Amendment to eliminate dark money and corporate money in our elections.

Federal income taxes were first instituted with passage of the Revenue Act of 1913. Statistics and evidence make it clear that the fastest economic growth and the most marked improvements in the common welfare have been achieved since then during times when tax rates are more steeply graduated. Information like this

contradicts decades of proclamations of ideological certainty by "conservatives" about the desirability of trickle-down economic policies and debt-financed tax cuts for high income earners. As these words rock and roll into the public consciousness, let our imaginations waltz out in the spotlight, led by an elegantly expert tango of our consciences and our sense of individual responsibility for contributing to the common good.

Social Insurance

Consider the social programs in the U.S. today that make life a little easier for everyone on the bottom rungs of the socioeconomic ladder. There are many programs that benefit unemployed people and retirees, veterans, disabled people, college students and those too young to vote. They include unemployment insurance, disability insurance, Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, Pell grants for higher education, a Children's Health Insurance Program, and food stamps. These programs can accurately be seen as forms of social insurance that serve to reduce tensions between the privileged people on Easy Street, who have the lion's share of the world's wealth, and the bottom 50% of the populace who are all somewhere in the vicinity of financial desperation.

People on Easy Street jealousy guard their privileges, often exhibiting unempathetic and even hostile attitudes toward underprivileged people. This is ironic considering that people on Easy Street have generally gained their great privileges, in large part, by reaping the benefits of the rigged ways our economic and political systems are established. The most blatant instance of such favoritism is found in provisions that are essentially welfare programs for corporations, and in those dang tax laws that allow high-income earners to pay nearly the lowest tax rates in many generations. In pathetic contrast, the poorest 25% of Americans have a net worth of zero or less, and the bottom 50% of Americans has an average family net worth of less than $40,000. These people are extremely insecure in their finances, and this state of affairs profoundly negatively affects their lives.

Think about the concept of social insurance in this context. This is a capital idea. Since social programs that provide benefits to the bottom 50% of Americans are a form of insurance that somewhat mitigates the desperate circumstances of the poorest and most vulnerable people in our society, these programs dampen impulses toward either criminal activity or increases in revolutionary unrest. This insurance basically allows the most privileged people to maintain many of their perks and privileges, and to continue being the main beneficiaries of the way our econopolitical system is structured.

Despite the fact that social insurance programs are partially a means of protecting the interests of rich people, many wealthy people have perversely been increasingly unwilling to finance these insurance policies. They apparently prefer that more money be spent on police, prisons, wars and Homeland Security. One result is that the USA has the highest rate of incarceration per capita of any nation on Earth, and suffers unnecessarily grave injustices. Another is that we spend more money on our military than most other nations combined.

Hard-nosed stances, as can be seen in these broad contexts, are foolishly myopic. Nonetheless, many wealthy conservatives arrogantly act in ways that are increasingly stingy, uncompassionate, greedy and outrageously anti-social. As my friend the underground Mole once observed, "Conservatism is bedeviled by pig belief that the rich must at all costs be allowed to perpetuate their good fortune."

Our society functioned better in terms of public financing of schools, infrastructure, government operations, research and development and national defense during the years from 1936 to 1980 when the top income tax rate was 70% or more every year. Astonishingly, the tax rate on the highest levels of income was 90% or more every year from 1944 until 1964. This high tax rate was put in place for 3 compelling purposes:

First, to finance large public investments in education, post-war re-tooling, and building infrastructure.

Second, to prevent moneyed interests from gaining a concentration of wealth and power that would allow them to dominate our political system and "challenge our government to a trial of strength and bid defiance to the laws of our country," as Thomas Jefferson put it. Jefferson was an admirable shining light of the Enlightenment Era -- "the Age of Reason". When he made this observation long ago, he reasonably and presciently foresaw the dangers of abuses of power by corporations and the wealthy.

And third, to roughly balance budgets during this period, so that the relative size of the debt incurred during World War II would diminish as the economy grew and moderate inflation took place. The national debt exceeded 100% of GDP by the end of World War II for the only time in history until then. By 1964, despite the fact that the debt had not been reduced, the proportion that the debt represented of the growing GDP had gone down from its high above 120% in 1946 to 60%. Note that the national debt once again began exceeding 100% of the GDP in 2012, up from a post-World War II low of under 40% from 1970 to 1982. We're excessively exploiting this expediency! And the Trump administration began borrowing more than $1.5 trillion in December 2017 to finance huge tax breaks that are primarily benefitting giant corporations and the highest income earners. When the pandemic struck, Congress agreed to borrow almost $3 trillion in April 2020 alone, and big chunks of the borrowing were designed to bail out big businesses, rather than help all the little folk hurt by the sudden advent of dire economic malaise.

> "Figures often beguile me, particularly when I have the arranging of them myself; in which case the remark attributed to Disraeli would often apply with justice and force: 'There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies and statistics.'"
>
> --- Mark Twain

Statistics are prone to "the Curse of Knowledge" phenomena. Let's try to transcend the mind-numbing affects they have, because statistics can give us valuable insights, and also convey credibility and give us understandings that could become a powerful incentive for us to rally support for reform efforts and positive changes.

Think again about the fact that Ronald Reagan launched his anti-tax revolution in 1981 by pandering to moneyed interests to such an extreme extent that the highest marginal tax rates were reduced from 70% in 1981 to 28% by 1988, rashly driving up the national debt. It was crazy to make this radical reduction to allow people on Easy Street to pay the lowest tax rates in generations at a time of big and expanding needs. This folly is a pathetic reflection of the anti-democratic nature of abuses of concentrated wealth and power. Simply seen, tax reforms that are more broadly fair must be enacted.

Economic fundamentalists who espouse trickle-down deceptions have been leaders of the movement to cut taxes and eliminate financial regulations. This movement has been backed by influence-abusing wealthy people and shrewdly Machiavellian politicians, along with people in right-wing think tanks, bombastic talk radio personalities, argumentative talking heads in the echo chamber of Fox News, and judgmental religious fundamentalists. And Tea Party politicians and Freedom Caucus puppets in the House of Representatives and U.S. Senate have given undue power to this movement by adamantly opposing fair compromises.

In Britain, the conservative government just experienced one of the biggest fiascos in its financial and political history in September and October 2022. Liz Truss became Prime Minister after the Trump-like Boris Johnson flamed out, and she reckoned that she could emulate Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan by pushing for more debt-financed tax cuts targeted to benefit the rich. This ill-timed and ill-advised misjudgment resulted in a drastic decline in financial markets, and forced her to resign after having the shortest tenure as Prime Minister in British history, at only 44 days.

Many people who adhere to such dogmas actually have interests that are much more in common with the 99% than with the goals and agendas of billionaires like industrialists in the Koch network or the gambling industry magnate Sheldon Adelson (who died in January 2021), or the dastardly Mercer family. But instead of seeking common cause, Trump Republicans have emotionally hijacked their supporters into going along with narrow-minded goals that actually undermine their own self-interest and the common good. Their passions have been exploited by shrewd operatives to give rich people more and more perks, privileges and power. It's as if the colonists involved in the Boston Tea Party in December 1773 had inexplicably decided to embrace the priorities of Tea Conglomerate ship owners and the taxing authorities of the British Empire -- rather than opposing taxation without fair representation and rejecting despotic rule!

Thomas Piketty states in his prominent economic tome *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* that Karl Marx's principal conclusion was what could be called the 'principle of infinite accumulation'. By this, Marx meant the inexorable tendency for capital to accumulate and become concentrated in ever fewer hands, with no natural

limit to the process. It was for this good reason that Marx predicted an apocalyptic end to capitalism. As it turns out, things are more complicated than that, and technological progress and increasing productivity and progressive political reforms have served, to a certain extent, as a partial counterweight to the process of wealth accumulation and the concentration of private capital and monopolies on power. But today, with regressive debt-financed tax cuts and the accumulation of wealth growing to new neo-Gilded Age extremes, this state of affairs is becoming excessively destabilizing and is likely to result in either revolutionary conflicts or authoritarian repression that would be necessary to perpetuate the corrupt status quo.

It is clearly time for America to change course, and head in more sensible directions. I urge all Americans to contact their representatives and ask them to make fairer efforts to reform our national tax policies. This would be a good path toward an improved overall well-being for the majority of Americans. Bruce Springsteen croons out a song in my imagination about a social wrecking ball, and I dream that this image of a wrecking ball will set the stage for a resurrected greater edifice that will provide a better modicum of fairness. I heartily encourage Trump cronies to see the truth in these ideas and alter their brutally devious anti-egalitarian course.

An Ideological Virus Infects the World

Thomas Paine was a religious man, so he made a distinction between the idolizing of gods that are embodiments of natural human attributes and a contrasting idolizing of kings, priests and wealthy people, who are merely other men. How did it come to be, he wondered, that "a race of men came into the world so exalted above the rest?" He publicly questioned the motives of those who dominate society, asking "whether they are the means of happiness -- or of misery -- to mankind."

Listen to some rationalizations made by such exalted eminences. Riches, according to financier J.P. Morgan, are "the reward of toil and virtue." Ha! Anyone who studies some of the unethical means by which J.P. Morgan gained his riches might strongly disagree. He had speculated shrewdly during the Panic of 1857 and garnered considerable wealth by investing in securities that had plunged in value. Then, in the dastardly "Hall Carbine Affair", he bought thousands of defective muskets for $3.50 each, early in the Civil War, and re-sold them to a General in the field for $22 each. These short rifles had serious defects: they would sometimes blow the thumb off a soldier who tried to use one of them. A Congressional committee noted this fact in the fine print of an obscure report way back then, but a federal judge upheld the deal as a fulfillment of a valid legal contract. J.P. Morgan went on to become one of the richest financiers and industrialists of his era.

Another rich guy, John D. Rockefeller, wholeheartedly agreed with J.P. Morgan's assessment of the remarkable righteousness of the wealthy. He went so far as to state that riches are "a gift from Heaven signifying, <This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased>". Oh, sure, sure! Jesus, in dramatic contrast, purportedly said that rich people are going to have a hell of a hard time getting into Heaven unless they show more empathy and generosity to poor people and the downtrodden.

Prominent labor union leader Eugene Debs scoffed at such self-congratulatory attitudes of the rich. Debs, who ran for president five times in the early twentieth century, once stated, "Riches are the savings of many in the hands of a few!" This characterization is much more accurate than the presumption that those who have the most money in the world are mainly virtuous and deserving people who God likes best. Great Gatsby!

Many wealthy conservatives today seem to be insensitive to social injustices, for they sure do have lots of rationalizations for unjust policies that hurt others in the name of God, profit, tax evasion, tribal affiliation and/or ideological righteousness.

It's instructive to recall that during the eighteenth century, kings were still asserting the "divine right" of the monarchy. Yep, this theory held that the right to rule arose directly from the will of God. So, God willed it -- and the peons had to either go along with it or suffer the consequences. "According to the doctrine of the divine right of kings, only God can judge an unjust king," states the Wikipedia consensus. This doctrine implies that any attempt to depose the king, or even to restrict his power, runs contrary to the will of God, and it may even constitute a sacrilegious act. Acting in ways that a monarch considered to be treasonous is danger enough,

and to compound this by taking a risk of being eternally damned due to sacrilege would be practically crazy. Nonetheless, the desperate need for reform finally drove the French people to overthrow their king in 1789.

Strong parallels exist between rationalizations that support monarchy and those that grease the wheels of domineering influence by the rich. In most monarchies throughout history, curiously, holy leaders of one Church or another frequently collaborated with the elevated souls in the nobility to help control, exploit and oppress the populace. Both kings and the Church shared the ambition of making sure no one violated God's plan, so that the rulers could maintain their exalted positions. Reading up on the history of French rule during the eighteenth century, it is startling to realize how corrupt the politics were then, and how venal and promiscuous the morals were of the "nobility". The colorful Madame de Pompadour, royal mistress of King Louis XVI, could have given us an earful about the scandalous shenanigans that went on in those days. Today, many of the world's ultra-rich do not seem to be any more ethical than those rascals in the prerevolutionary French aristocracy!

The doctrine of Manifest Destiny was an early example of a multitude of spurious rationalizations that say God favors a domineering group over an oppressed one. Manifest Destiny held that it was moral and inevitable that American settlers should expand across the continent, and this conviction was used to justify a war with Mexico over the Republic of Texas, as well as the forcible removal of numerous tribes of Native Americans from their traditional lands. Such imperialistic expansionism involved exceptionally ruthless and unjust offensives, and exterminations. All modern instances of similar rationalizations should be rejected for their glaring injustices.

J.P. Morgan, in any case, was one of the classic robber barons of his time. In all fairness, he did use his riches, eventually, for some redeeming purposes. He played a key role in leading a coalition of bankers that saved the financial system during the Panic of 1907, and he became a generous philanthropist, so he wasn't a completely greedy or unempathetic man. He ironically died in 1913, just 9 months before Congress gave birth to the Federal Reserve central banking system. The Fed was established to provide emergency measures to rescue the economy in future economic panics and recessions.

Two-time Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney was a classic representative of the super-rich subset of the wealthiest 1% of Americans whose self-rationalizations and ideological perspectives oozed with superiority and contempt at "the lazy laborers" who cost businesses so much in wages and benefits, and unemployment benefits when they are laid off. Romney exulted in his good fortune at having amassed a large fortune through enormously profitable private equity schemes, and he tried to obscure the often-scurrilous means by which he personally gained these big bucks. Then Donald Trump came along and refused to release his tax returns, almost certainly to avoid the disclosure of many ways, legal and illegal, that he has taken advantage of real estate law to avoid paying taxes. Other illicit shenanigans and malfeasance abound.

After World War I and the Roaring Twenties, sure enough the Federal Reserve was needed to deal with another even more cataclysmic economic setback, the worst in American history -- the Great Depression. The Fed made mistakes in their response to this severe economic contraction of the 1930s by tightening the money supply instead of flooding markets with liquidity. It also let thousands of banks fail instead of finding a smart way to save them and gain large benefits for taxpayers as a reward for the action. Securing benefits for taxpayers has a much fairer ring to it than spending trillions of dollars to bail out the banking system and then having financial institutions rebound to make record profits using cheap money provided by the Fed, while people on Main Street as a whole struggle with deep insecurities. And since early 2020, no one has talked much about the reliance on deficit financing to cope with the disastrous effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Right Action and the Ten Commandments

One of my pet theories is that expansive understandings are the key to eventual right action. I strongly believe the common good can be achieved by seeking the most far-sighted balance between selfish individualism and the collective good. To accomplish greater good goals, more win-win solutions to problems should be instituted. A sensible long-term perspective gives strong credence to this understanding.

Throughout the history of humanity's evolving cultures, the processes of natural selection have strongly favored groups of human beings that put the self-interest of their whole group ahead of the narrower self-interest of

individuals in the group. Natural selection has also favored those groups that developed strong enough religious beliefs to strike fear of divine punishment into people's hearts, so that members of the group would obey moral codes consistent with the group's best interests.

> Groups that cooperated together survived better than other groups in which too many individuals freeloaded or cheated or were not willing to sacrifice for the greater good of their clan. "Altruistic groups" had much better survival advantages than groups with too many narrowly selfish individuals.
>
> --- *Revelations of a Modern Prophet*

Think about the Ten Commandments. Recognizing evolutionary evidence of the central role that group selection has played in human development, one can see a broad utility underlying the Ten Commandments. Of course, the first four commandments are obsessed with *obedience* to biblical beliefs, and contain a divine threat that, for those who do not believe and obey, they will be consigned to a terrible fate in a hellish place for all of eternity. Not only that, but the jealous Lord Almighty will punish the children of those who disobey "Him" to the third and fourth generation for their failure to conform to this belief system. But the other six Commandments, in revealing contrast, are basic codes of Golden Rule morality, ethical reciprocity and peaceable coexistence within groups. Taken all together, such commandments help assure the prospering and survival of the group itself.

Ideas consonant with this grand conception infuse these common sense writings, and I'm hopeful that readers will join me in a crusade to make our world a much better one for humanity as a whole, today and tomorrow.

Abraham Lincoln once stated early in his life that his greatest ambition was to be truly esteemed by his fellow men, and to deserve this high regard by rendering himself worthy of their esteem. That is noble and worthy leadership. Today, one might think that the greatest ambition of most of our partisan political representatives is of a much meaner and more myopic set of driving forces, especially by unprincipled conservatives.

Abraham Lincoln once said (paraphrased): "The task of our forefathers was to uprear upon the hills and valleys of our land a political edifice of liberty and equal rights, and it is ours to transmit these undecayed by the lapse of time and untorn by usurpation to the next generation. This task is imperatively required of us to faithfully perform in gratitude to our fathers, justice to ourselves, duty to posterity, and love for our species in general."

The ties between people in "in-groups" of our ancestors morphed over the ages from commitments to clans to broader commitments and concerns for the best interests of increasingly large groups. Social developments made it more advantageous for early peoples to expand commitments from clans to tribes and then to agrarian communities, then to villages and towns, and cities, and city-states, and then entire nations. Each expansion in inclusiveness led to positive developments for our kind, like the auspicious boons integral to social cohesion

The next logical and moral step in our evolution is toward greater international collaboration and more effective international laws. And beyond that, the ethical nature of our commitments needs to be expanded to another even larger group: all our descendants in future generations. I encourage readers to peruse and give support to the proposed Bill of Rights for Future Generations in this Common Sense Revival, in dawning light of these ideas.

In his article *The Evolutionary Significance of Religion: Multi-Level Selection,* Michael Dowd explored the latest ideas about natural selection on multiple levels, not just in individuals. He stated that these evolving ideas have "enormous practical implications for how economic, social, and political leaders attempt to solve civilization-scale problems." Books like *The Social Conquest of Earth* by Edward O. Wilson, and *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion,* and *Moral Origins: The Evolution of Virtue, Altruism and Shame* all make the case that the concept of group selection is needed to explain human morality.

Michael Dowd added: "Religion has historically been a profoundly important adaptive feature. Without it, group cohesiveness and the motivation of individuals to die for their tribe or state or nation would likely never have emerged from the palette of instincts that we inherited from our pre-human ancestors. And without that kind of motivation, a group would not be able to defend itself against the incursions of neighboring (or long-distance conquering) cultures."

"It is vital to remember that religion is about *right relationship to reality,* not the supernatural," observed

Michael Dowd. He further pointed out that a noted philosopher of religion named Loyal Rue tells us that *religion is not actually about God.* Loyal Rue wrote: "The most profound insight in the history of humankind is that we should seek to live in accord with reality. Indeed, living in harmony with reality may be accepted as a formal definition of wisdom. If we live at odds with reality (foolishly), then we will be doomed, but if live in right relationship with reality (wisely), then we shall be saved. Humans everywhere, and at all times, have had at least a tacit understanding of this fundamental principle. What we are less in agreement about is how we should think about reality and what we should do to bring ourselves into harmony with it."

Dowd continued: "Just because pre-scientific manifestations of religion necessarily posited supernatural beings and forces does not mean that religions of today and tomorrow need do so." Since religions provide overarching worldviews that attempt to answer questions of meaning, they provide guidance and "personal wholeness" and "social coherence." And, for the greater good, this guidance surely should become more expansive!

Dowd concluded that he is grateful for the evolutionary role that atheists and agnostics are playing "in helping (nay, forcing) our stodgy old (all-too-often dysfunctional) religions to catch up with the wealth of knowledge that science now offers."

Lord, let me be the person my dog thinks I am.

Note: No "stable genius" "moron" or any of his cultish trust-betraying loyalists could persuade me that denying important scientific understandings and violating precautionary principles is the right course of action. OR that it's okay to look the other way when seeing our representatives pursue policies and priorities that are blindered, treacherously socially irresponsible or overly short-term-oriented. Those corroded qualities are good for nothing other than a rueful laugh -- and being spurred on toward corrective action.

"Surely, perversely twisted distortions of reality that are made by the Trumpster for his own malicious narcissistic self-gain are odious and anti-social."

"Irreverence is the champion of liberty, and its only sure defense."

--- Mark Twain

<u>Thinking about Good Acts and a Just Society</u>

Mankind is an eternal seeker of reward, even for doing good. People feel that there ought to be some greater recompense for doing good than just a clear conscience or a feeling of righteousness, and they expect a kind of "pleasure" for making moral choices or taking ethical actions. This pleasure may be one of community esteem or gratitude, or a self-interested hope of receiving something good in return, or a feeling of freedom from a sense of guilt. Many God-fearing religious people do good acts in hopes of gaining an eternally pleasant afterlife for themselves, or to avoid an imagined divine damnation.

While almost every person would say they believe people should do good and help remedy glaring injustices, few of us do all the good that we could. This is one of the deep contradictions of human nature. John Fowles, in his thought-provoking philosophical treatise *The Aristos,* considered this issue, noting: "For the last two and a half millennia almost every great thinker, every great saint, and every great artist has advocated, personified and celebrated -- or at least implied -- the nobility and excellence of the good act as the basis of the just society."

If we were to structure our societies so that incentives for doing good were more attractive, then more good would result. We all face a multitude of anxieties in life, from fundamental universal anxieties to a variety of individual anxieties. Since all share these anxieties, to some extent, the hygienic emotion of empathy should have the effect of uniting us rather than isolating us. Instead, we tend to let nefarious schemers divide us, and master manipulators zealously try to gain benefits through divide-to-conquer ruses. As a result, as John Fowles explains, it is "as if the citizens of a country would defend it by each barricading himself in his own house."

Compassionate kindness to others, and actions against injustice and inequality, are crucially important, so they should be regarded as equivalent to *functional acts of hygiene,* not merely as acts done to bring hoped-for recompense. In *The Aristos,* John Fowles provides an excellent concise summary of his personal perspectives on big ideas in life, and expressed this convincing opinion: "As soon as we treat pleasure as a kind of successful

bet, and then expect this sort of pleasure from moral choices and actions, we are in trouble." He clarifies that the main problem with such an attitude is that we may reach the conclusion: "only good actions that promise pleasure or personal rewards are worth our doing."

The intentions that motivate good actions should be a broader desire to institute more freedom and fairness for all -- i.e., more justice and equality. Otherwise, actions can turn out to be consequentially amoral or socially immoral. John Fowles also states that there is a "sadly wide category where actions may seem good to the person performing the action, but are clearly evil in their effects."

Despite the broad consensus on the desirability of people to do good for the greater good of all, most people seem to see "a perverse but deeper truth: it is better generally to do nothing than generally to do good." John Fowles adduces many reasons for this contradiction in purposes. We are not only seekers of the spiritually sublime, but we are also eternal seekers of rewards for ourselves. We expect some sort of compensation for doing good, and more than just a clear conscience or a feeling of righteous self-approval. We seek the hope of benefits in return, or wealth, or appreciated recognition, or personal gratitude, or community esteem. Or we seek to assuage a sense of guilt. John Fowles lists the main causes he sees for people's failure to do good:

-- there is uncertainty as to what the outcome of one's actions may really be;
-- there is a perception that the action contemplated is so small relative to the final intention that the action seems pointless;
-- a conflict exists between do-good intentions and more narrowly selfish ends;
-- a fatalistic belief is felt that it's only an illusion that we have freedom of choice in action;
-- profoundly confusing complexities exist in the nature of understanding;
-- our opposition may give 'counter-support' to what is opposed;
-- it seems futile to oppose relativistic "evils".

In writing about the failure of most people to contribute to the greater good, Fowles attributes "this strange and irrational apathy" to religion-engendered myths that imply that doing good will bring us eternal pleasure in an afterlife, "and that thus the good man is happier than the bad. The world around us is full of evidence that these are indeed myths: good men are very often far less happy than bad ones, and good actions very often bring nothing but pain." He adds: "Over the last two hundred years there has been a great improvement in personal and public hygiene and cleanliness; and this was largely brought about by persuading people that the results of being dirty and apathetic in the face of disease were not acts of God, but preventable acts of nature; not the sheer misery in things, but the controllable mechanisms of life." … "We have had the first, the physical, phase of the hygienic revolution; it is time we went to the barricades for the second, the mental."

We can't shelter in place in inertia, backwardness, anti-adaptive rigidity, cultivated antipathy or the harsh hegemony of a dominion of vested interests and white male patriarchy over the common good.

Illusions of "Fiscal Conservatives"

Republicans have repeatedly tried to portray themselves as *fiscally conservative*. Really? They sure did not act as fiscal conservatives when they supported George W. Bush's tax cuts financed by trillions of dollars of borrowed money. They were NOT fiscally conservative when they enacted the Prescription Drug Act of 2003 that supercharged Big Pharma profits -- at the cost of increasing national debt obligations by more than $1 trillion. And they certainly were not acting like fiscal conservatives when they consistently supported debt-financed wars and poorly-controlled military spending. Yes, total spending by the federal government has increased faster during administrations of Republican presidents than during ones of Democrats, so attempts to deceive the American people into thinking that Republicans are fiscal conservatives make them appear distinctly and ridiculously dishonest!

"You can fool some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time, but you can not fool all of the people all of the time."

--- President Abraham Lincoln

There are other main features of Ronald Reagan's ideological revolution that Trump Republicans are emulating. They strive to eliminate regulations and undermine employee's power to collectively organize and bargain. By making extensive efforts to eliminate regulations on corporations, banks, hedge funds and other Wall Street entities, Reagan's ideological campaign contributed to a Savings and Loan crisis in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In this costly economic calamity, more than 1,000 Savings and Loan Associations failed.

Similar deregulatory actions negatively contributed to a much more expensive credit crisis and recession that began in late 2008. These "laissez-faire" policies and the economic bubble wreaked havoc on the economy and caused a widespread spike in unemployment and home foreclosures. Enormous bailouts were necessitated as a result, and the Federal Reserve and central banks worldwide were forced to desperately inject many trillions of dollars in liquidity into the banking system. One of the unintended consequences of such policies is that a record number of people in the United States are living below the poverty line, and in the awful throes of the pandemic, things have gone south at an alarming rate. We rightly should Build Back Better.

Conservatives appear to live in an "intellectual bubble." They often get their information from Trump spin, Fox News or right-wing talk radio, like the program of now deceased Rush Limbaugh, for decades), and they seem to be easily swayed by all the policy analysis they are repetitiously fed from billionaire-financed far-right think tanks. They appear to be generally unaware of contrary evidence, and oblivious to how their opinions, attitudes and stoked fears sound to outsiders -- or to how others are negatively affected. With the advent of Trump, things went from bad to much worse.

> "Sometimes I wonder whether the world is being run by smart people who are putting us on, or by imbeciles who really mean it."
>
> --- Mark Twain

Dante, in *Convivio,* wrote "And what else, day after day, endangers and destroys cities, regions, individuals so much as yet another amassing of wealth by someone. This very amassing releases further desires, which cannot be satisfied without someone paying the price."

Republican Dwight Eisenhower wrote a letter in 1954 that addressed the need for what he called "moderation" in government. He made this cogent observation: "Should any political party attempt to abolish social security and unemployment insurance, and eliminate labor laws and farm programs, you would not hear of that party again in our political history. There is a tiny splinter group, of course, that believes you can do these things. … Their number is negligible and they are stupid." Weigh in, Tucker Carlson!

<u>Rhapsody in Blue</u>

Republicans rhapsodize with vaulting rhetoric about American Exceptionalism, but their bait-and-switch policies prioritize exceptionally generous deals for top income earners in the U.S. while imposing relatively stingy deals on everyone else. They claim to represent "a shining city on a hill", but their blurry vision can be seen more accurately to resemble a glaring searchlight atop fortress walls that is blinding many Americans so that they will be deluded into opposing common sense solutions to our society's numerous solvable problems.

In addition to their overarching goal of cutting taxes for people who are already wealthy, their goal of imposing a more reactionary form of right-wing social engineering upon the American people -- especially on women! -- is anathema to our national ideals. The American people value both liberty and religious freedom, and they dislike abuses of authority. A provocative quote often misattributed to Sinclair Lewis in his novel about repressive totalitarianism, *It Can't Happen Here,* provides a disconcerting perspective: "When fascism comes to America, it will be wrapped in the flag, carrying the cross."

President Biden denounced "MAGA Republicans" in late August 2022, when he said, "They're a threat to our very democracy. They refuse to accept the will of the people. They embrace political violence. They don't believe in democracy." The same day, he accused them of moving toward "semi-fascism."
A week later, Biden spoke at Independence Hall in Philadelphia, stating that "too much of what's happening in our country today is not normal," and naming Trump and his followers as culpable. He added, "We do ourselves no favors to pretend otherwise." Biden was trying to capitalize on a controversial policy plan released by Sen. Rick

Scott (R-Fla.) earlier this year that called for expiration dates for all federal laws, which the president noted would include those establishing Social Security and Medicare.
"In the United States, former president Donald Trump has presumptively rejected future election results, and a majority of Republican candidates on the ballot this fall for major state and federal elective offices have joined him in repudiating the outcome of the 2020 presidential election — an epidemic of election denialism in the United States that historians and political scientists define as a core element in any country's drift toward authoritarian rule, writes Marc Fisher in *Leaders of democracies increasingly echo Putin in authoritarian tilt -- From Italy to Brazil to the United States, political leaders increasingly are echoing Russian President Vladimir Putin and one another by embracing far-right authoritarianism.*

"Recent years have brought a sharp reaction in many parts of the world, as globalization, political polarization, the rise of social media and a collapse of trust in major institutions have left many people feeling betrayed by their governments, torn apart from their careers and alone in their communities, according to historians, political scientists and sociologists who have studied these shifts in the world's economies and governments.

The result has been a similar quest for nationalist solutions in country after country, and a growing bond among the far-right autocrats in those places. For example, Hungary's prime minister, Victor Orban, and Italy's new prime minister, Giorgia Meloni, have spoken to acclaim at gatherings of the Conservative Political Action Coalition — a group that has helped propel Trump's movement in the United States.

"The trend we are seeing reflects a disillusionment around the world that the democratic process fails to produce effective, charismatic leaders," said Nikolas Gvosdev, a professor of national security studies at the U.S. Naval War College. "In country after country, the idea spreads that we need strong leaders who get things done. And it's not just in politics: We see the valorization of tech CEOs like Elon Musk as problem solvers who get the job done."

<u>On Fascism</u>

An incisive three-frame political cartoon shows a maniacal Donald Trump wearing a "F YOUR FEELINGS" button and shouting "DEMOCRATS ARE COMMUNISTS! SOCIALISTS! CROOKS! LIARS! AUTHORITARIANS! THUGS! 2020 WAS STOLEN! STORM THE CAPITOL!"

In the second frame, a distraught Joe Biden is observing, "MAGA REPUBLICANS ARE SEMI-FASCISTS." And in the third frame, a stressed out elephant with a silk hanky is saying, "… OH MY WORD! HEAVEN FORFEND! GOODNESS GRACIOUS ME! SUCH LANGUAGE FROM PRESIDENT BIDEN!"

That is an appropriate cartoon, because the most pronounced strength of MAGA Republicans is to cunningly pretend to be the victim, twist the truth, deny reality, hijack emotions, shout to high heavens, weaponize resentments, amplify grievances, blame moderates and liberals, bully people, force their oppressive policies on others, pretend to be occupying the moral high ground -- and demand dominating influence, power and control over everyone else.

The Republican Party can be boiled down to one truth. They are the party that doesn't want to be told what to do ("Don't Tread on Me"), yet wants to tell everyone else what to do, especially on issues of reproductive rights, LGBTQ human rights, and their opposition to gun safety measures. "When you think about everything that they do in this context it makes sense. Their hypocrisy is completely logical to them. If you're part of one of their groups, conservative, white, Christian you're in. But membership means you need to be all in, or you're a RINO."

MAGA followers are definitely acting in ways that President recently described as "almost like semi-fascism". Republican voters have spent months nominating MAGA extremists who are hell-bent on continuing the crude onslaught of hateful rhetoric against LGBTQ+ people, attacking public schools, undermining our democracy, and imposing draconian abortion restrictions. All of these reactionary plans are massively unpopular, which means we have to spend every day of the next two months letting the public know exactly what's at stake.

Republicans have weaponized divide-to-conquer tactics from the Demagogues Playbook by demonizing and dehumanizing progressives and liberals, painting them as radicals and communists and unpatriotic socialists, and

trying to deceive voters into not seeing how extremist the MAGA Republican Party has become in its monomaniacal pursuit of domineering power no matter what the cost or consequences.

Making matters drastically worse, Republicans have managed to capture the Supreme Court and many federal courts by stacking them with far right conservatives. Ominously, philosopher Jason Stanley of Yale University, who is best known for his 2018 book *How Fascism Works,* recently tweeted: "Once you have the courts you can pretty much do whatever you want."

For a good understanding of this court capture scheme and its consequences, see my essay *Calamitous Consequences of Success of a Secret Conspiratorial Scheme to Capture the Courts.*

Curiously, conservative evangelical voters and those who manifest *Don't Tread on Me* Tea Party attitudes have been duped into supporting the narrow Republican agenda. How was that achieved, again? Through effective uses of framing, divisive tactics, deceptive arguments, arrogantly uncompromising stances, hyped-up extreme partisanship, the demonization of others, preying on people's fears, and slickly promoting rigidly narrow doctrines. The corporate-controlled mainstream media supports this offensive by pushing devious distorting spin, particularly on Fox News and other even further right and more extreme outlets like OAN and Breitbart and various nefarious social media sites. Confident and simplistic proclamations by Republican politicians have been used to fool many Americans into accepting trickle-down deceptions and on-your-own-economic plans and bad provisions in international trade deals. Mitt Romney pretended in the weeks before the 2012 election that he was primarily concerned about the middle class, but his plans had the same goal as George W. Bush's: to enrich millionaires and billionaires at the expense of everyone else. And so it has come to pass that Trump Republicans utilize the same pathological tactics.

Examining the National Debt

The U.S. national debt was just under $20 trillion when Trump took office in January 2017, and it reached $28 trillion soon after he was removed from office. Today at the end of October 2022, the national debt stands at just over $31 trillion. This debt now represents more than $90,000 for every man, woman and child in the United States. This huge amount of debt is undermining the potential well-being and prospects of people in the future. We can no longer afford to allow the all-but-criminal evasion of taxes by rich people that has contributed to this unprecedented level of debt.

We should be clear about the starkly wrongheaded nature of the swindle that allows huge sums of money to be borrowed to finance low tax rates for the rich. Consider one compelling reason why. Even if not a penny of the principal balance of borrowed money is ever paid back, every taxpayer in every future year will be forced to contribute to paying the interest on this woe-begotten debt. The interest cost on borrowed money amounts to 100% of the amount borrowed every 18 years, assuming a long-term average interest rate of only 4%, and this compounds when no payments are made on the principal. It is completely crazy to borrow trillions of dollars to give it to rich people today, knowing that the boon to wealthy people and their heirs will cost people in the future 100% of the amount borrowed every 18 years or so, over and over and over again. It is malfeasance for any of our representatives to be accomplices to this scam.

I call on all our American leaders to come together to help enact a Fair Taxation Initiative like the one proposed in *One Dozen Big Initiatives to Positively Transform Our Societies.* This change would make our economy fairer and healthier, and allow us to invest more sensibly in national infrastructure maintenance and improvements, and healthier communities, and vital protections of natural ecosystems. The American people would be more secure, the size of future deficits would be reduced, and our democracy would be made stronger and more resilient.

Recognizing how outrageous it is that the productivity of American workers has roughly doubled in the past few decades while their average hourly compensation has increased very little, we must demand a better deal. One outcome of this situation is that wages are at their lowest share of GDP on record, while the profit margins corporations are making are at the highest level ever. Meanwhile, total taxes paid by corporations as a percent of GDP are the lowest in decades. These facts reflect highly unfair trends that should be reversed through

sensible public policies. Otherwise, the pressure cooker of inequities will cause increasing adversities for the vast majority of the American people.

A Surprising but Relevant Factor in Considerations of Fairness

Here is a pragmatic perspective that should be like a transcendent epiphany to fair-minded policy makers and utilitarian philosophers. As mentioned in the Introduction to Common Sense Revival, it turns out that when people earn an annual income of $50,000 to $75,000, they feel happier than others who earn less money. In surprising counterpoint, however, people who earn more than $75,000 per year are not especially any happier. Here is a powerful reason why we should prevent rich people from grabbing the preponderance of the benefits of our economic system for themselves, and stop allowing them to monopolize the nation's wealth. And here is a convincing reason why we should make our national system of taxation more progressively equitable by structuring it to be more steeply graduated.

This insight leads to proposals to resist the influence of high-income earners to get lower tax rates on the highest levels of their incomes through the expedient tactic of borrowing money from the public treasury.

A more steeply graduated tax system would facilitate the improvement in the overall level of well-being in these United States, and it would ensure that the vast majority of people would have a better chance of being able to succeed in their pursuit of health and happiness. Progressive taxation is one of the fairest ideas ever devised because of the fact that the same rate of tax is assessed on every taxpayer for every dollar that anyone earns, with higher rates of tax being assessed on higher categories of income.

Politicians on the political right have a pathetic propensity for coming up with shrewd rationalizations for plans that unjustly shift the tax burden from high-income earners to everyone else. Notably and consequentially, the tax rate on the richest 400 Americans has been reduced by two-thirds since the early 1960s, while the overall tax rate on the average worker has nearly doubled. Shocking! It is amazing that we haven't had a revolution with so significant an increase in this level of inequality and injustice! It is even more outrageous and irresponsible that this trend has caused a shift of obligations and hardships from people today to all people in the future. And Trump Republicans have drastically compounded this injustice.

Let's intelligently implement fairer tax policies that will alleviate the sense of guilt that all rich people should feel because of the unfairness of status quo policies that excessively benefit vested interests!

Insidiously stealthy strategies like Tax Cut swindles create a big risk to the entire international economy and the well-being of billions of people around the globe, so we should be willing "to think outside the box", and find ways to create a safer, fairer and more stable global economy. One way to do this would be to seek restitution from wealthy people who have abused the power of the influence of their money to gain an ever-larger share of the wealth created in our capitalist economy. This restitution would be sensibly required from those who have rigged the system by engineering our national policies to their (unaffordably) narrow advantages.

This leads to an important idea. To reduce the probability of a severe economic calamity caused by excessive and irresponsibly generated debt, and to thus forestall related social turmoil, we need to take extraordinary measures. The status quo is no longer acceptable; more eminently fair measures are necessary. One emphasis of these measures should be to dramatically reduce inequality in our society, and mitigate the terribly spiking gap between the fortunate and the unfortunate in the world right now. And we should do so in greener ways.

A simple restitution proposal is contained below that would dramatically reduce inequalities and the risks of a severe debt crisis. This proposal would make our societies substantially fairer, and would do so with a surprising minimum of economic hardship. Check it out! It is under the heading "A Shockingly Fair-Minded Plan", further on in this *Uncommon Sense and Fair-Mindedness* (see pages 106-108).

A popular gambit in the U.S. has been to use contested concepts of freedom and true economic well-being to justify low tax rates for people with the highest incomes. Quite often lost in translation is the fact that *social responsibility* is a necessary adjunct of individual freedom. An integral part of the "social contract" is that those people who have lots of money have a larger responsibility for helping make our society function better.

They are, after all, the only people who can easily afford to finance crucially important investments in social safety net programs and the greater good for all.

One freedom that people with huge amounts of wealth and influence insistently proclaim is their right to take advantage of the existing rigged system at the expense of all others, even when their activities are achieved in ways that will be detrimental to our heirs in the future. The radically regressive changes in taxation that have been made since 1980 have had a cumulative effect of giving rich people an increasing monopoly on the nation's wealth. Monopolies are not good. We have to fix that! Too big to fail? Take action to fix it!

In Justin Trudeau's surprising victory in Canada's national elections in October 2015, he boldly advocated a more progressive tax plan designed to give tax breaks to people in the middle class and invest in infrastructure, and sensibly pay for this by assessing higher tax rates on high levels of income. That's a commendable plan!

Our nation's Founders honorably championed Enlightenment Era ideals of democratic fairness and equality, and reasonable opportunities for all to pursue happiness. They also advocated greater good goals as measured by the general welfare of the people. None of our Founders would have defended excessive power and influence by an oligarchic few. Not a single one of them would have favored giving huge advantages to the top 1% of the people, when such an action hurts the other 99%.

On the Topic of Restitution

Demand restitution and recompense from democracy-assaulting Trump Republicans who are endangering our republic and corruptly abusing influence and power in Congress to such misguided extents. To start, demand five immediate concessions:

(1) All of our representatives should help pass legislation that will re-empower the Voting Rights Act of 1965 to make voting rights fairer and prevent discriminatory restrictions on voting. This will be true integrity.
(2) Pass legislation to restrict Big Money and *Dark Money* in elections and lobbying, essentially overturning the Supreme Court's wrongly-decided *Citizens United* ruling that has given moneyed interests such awfully domineering power and influence over government.
(3) Pass legislation requiring the redistricting of all counties in every state in the U.S., using non-partisan redistricting commissions. Base the drawing of these fairer districts on the 2020 Census, and make them effective on January 1, 2024. This will have the doubly positive effect of eliminating unconscionably unfair gerrymanders and desirably serving to dramatically lessen the damaging extent of extreme polarization that is so harmfully allowing divide-to-conquer politicians to exert domineering control over the American people.
(4) Pass legislation into federal law that will codify reasonable Roe v. Wade protections of women, guaranteeing every women the right to choose to have an abortion to terminate an unwanted pregnancy before fetal viability, and additionally give every woman and man who wants it easy access to contraception.
(5) Pass the proposed Judiciary Act of 2022 to increase the number of Justices on the Supreme Court, and help confirm four new Justices, to be nominated by President Biden in consultation with the American Bar Association and good faith collaboration with Republican moderates, so that the high court will be better balanced and less politically partisan.

To Be, or Not To Be: This Question Concerns Austerity

Any story that involves central characters with names like Rogoff and Reinhart has a good chance of being a juicy one. Since this story is a matter of fact, it's even better. Like good old Mark Twain once said, "Truth is stranger than fiction, but it is because Fiction is obliged to stick to possibilities; Truth isn't."

A curious turning point in history took place in 2010 when the world was right in the middle of one of those periodic panicky economic cataclysms that characterize capitalist systems. World leaders had been more-or-less valiantly striving to combat the specter of a global depression in the wake of the credit crisis of late 2008, but suddenly they shifted their strategies to a struggle to control the explosion of debt that resulted from this crisis. What had caused this dramatic development? Why had concerted efforts to stimulate the economy suddenly given way to initiatives to impose austerity measures on people in the U.S. and in Europe? Who was manipulating the control mechanisms, Wizard of Oz-like, that drove these two countervailing strategies?

Mother Jones magazine provided a stunningly convincing perspective on this issue in a 2013 article titled *Death by a Thousand Cuts: Belt-Tightening Wasn't the Cure for Ailing Economy. It Was the Last Straw.* This article essentially concerned the misguided nature of austerity programs. It addressed an influential paper published in January 2010 in which Harvard economists Kenneth Rogoff and Carmen Reinhart claimed to have proved that when a nation's debt reaches 90% of its annual economic activity, this is a dangerous threshold. Throughout history, they contended, such a threshold has caused a slowing of economic growth. "As economic studies go, it was nothing short of a bombshell." The report had the effect of radically shifting the policies of many nations from efforts to cope with recession, joblessness and the aftermath of the severe credit crisis, to efforts aimed at reducing deficits. The Rogoff and Reinhart paper was a driving force behind this abandonment of economic stimulus programs and a shift to slashing government spending.

Ironically, an error in the Excel spreadsheet used in the Rogoff/Reinhart study was discovered two years later, when independent researchers found out that the study's findings had been derived by relying on what turned out to be a mistake in their evaluation. What this means is that one of the shoddy beliefs that anti-Obama conservatives clung to in their stubborn opposition to increases in the debt limit was found to be inaccurate.

The debt limit crisis that confronted the U.S. in October 2013 was a bizarre one. Conservative Republicans made a blustery stand against another increase in the national debt limit, even though it was the wrong time to try to insist on immediate efforts to balance the budget. If you buy a new car to get to work, or retain the services of a computer geek to fix your computer, you have made a commitment, and when the balance comes due on your credit card, that moment is the wrong time to refuse to pay the obligation!

After the financial crisis brought on by the bursting of the housing bubble led to a wider recession, "What was needed was for the federal government to apply the same urgency to rescuing the economy that it had to rescuing the banks." Most economists agree that stimulative government spending is needed during economic contractions, and during their immediate aftermath, to help the economy recover and resume growth. But then Republican politicians and other proponents of austerity measures argued, rather disingenuously and contrary to Keynesian understanding, that deficit spending hurts the economy, rather than actually stimulating it and helping it recover from a recession. Fast forward a few years, and political gamesmanship and the urgings of profiteers make Trump Republicans look extraordinarily hypocritical, like deeply dishonest operatives as they find merit in opening up the spigots to add to the spiking national debt in order to bail out the economy during the pandemic, on top of financing their regressive tax cuts. Of course, as soon as Joe Biden became president, the deficit hawks began to reassert themselves, In October, the debt-to-GDP ratio exceeds a high risk 130%.

<u>Another Shift Arrives</u>

There is vital value in understanding how a financial crisis came about, and what preventative lessons have been learned from it. But let's now pivot to a more important question: "What should we do now?"

The case is quite strong that what we need now is not austerity and extreme conservatism, but smart public investments and more progressive national policies. Key conflicts exist between the conservative agenda and the common good, and it is counterproductive for the overarching goal of conservative politicians in recent decades to have been to cut taxes and make anti-egalitarian changes in tax policies. Such plans have the undesirable effect of shifting the burden of taxes from high-income earners to everyone else in every future year.

I smile broadly. Why is it, I wonder rhetorically, that our great experiment in democracy has been corrupted by moneyed interests to such an extent that they have managed to get our representatives to champion the narrow interests of the richest folks to the detriment of positive actions consistent with the common good?

Most of the politicians who represent us say they are committed to principle; but unfortunately, their principles generally involve "figuring out new ways to funnel more federal money to the people who need it least." This observation, made by Gail Collins in a column titled *Missing the Bad Old Days,* concerned the practically malicious efforts by Republicans in 2013 to slash food stamp funding by $39 billion in a renewal of the national farm bill while at the same time utterly ignoring the option of cutting huge crop insurance subsidies that the legislation contained for the benefit of powerful wealthy vested interests. "Bah, humbug!"

The Pope Weighs In

The world's oldest living thing is a 6,000-year-old Bristlecone Pine named *Crusader* that lives in harsh conditions at a remote high-elevation location in rugged mountains. The last time I visited, a mystical vibe emanated from this tree through interspeciesal extrasensory clairsentience, telling me: "Grow slowly. Live in ways consistent with ecological realities. Be stoically persistent." Somehow I instantaneously knew this curious communiqué meant that it is a transcendent human obligation to cultivate an incisive awareness of the relative right found in broadly fairer national planning and policies, especially as viewed through a lens of the longer term greater good.

Pope Francis has repeatedly criticized the capitalist system. He once decried "the idolatry of money" and made a pointed attack on the deceitful ideology of trickle-down economics. He also bemoaned the fact that people have a "crude and naive trust in the goodness of those wielding economic power." He was particularly critical in his words concerning ideological dogmas that assume economic growth is a sufficient top social goal, and that deny the overarching responsibility for governments to exercise an active role in humanizing market economies.

At the time, arch-conservative Rush Limbaugh jumped on the Pope's words, accusing him of advocating "pure Marxism." Why the rancor? Here the Pope was proposing broader and deeper truths, and the reactive leader of American "dittoheads" at the time was practically apoplectic with fervent conviction in promoting contrasting superficial untruths. Limbaugh, of course, was compensated exceedingly well for his maniacal propaganda, and he paid very low tax rates on his ill-gained windfall compensation, in accordance with the politically determined tax system that has its main emphasis on treating high-income earners to historically low rates of tax.

As some of the hard working, hard-drinking, hard-living, hardscrabble miners of the late 19th century in Wild West Colorado could have cautioned Rush Limbaugh, "To Hell You Ride." Some things just go gaily hand in hand!

Mainstream economic theories treat natural resources as a free good, as though they are provided at no cost, and as if waste and resource depletion are of no concern. These theories assume that perpetual growth and ever-rising consumption will be sustainable into the indefinite future. But the premise that economic growth automatically equals prosperity is absurd, especially given that growth in consumption does not give adequate consideration to associated environmental damages or the highly adverse implications of squandered resources and huge amounts of pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. The idea is crazy that continuous growth is desirable, when understood in the context that finite natural resources simply can't support infinite growth. "This, of course, contradicts physics," declared Paul Craig Roberts, one of the founding theoreticians of supply-side economics. Roberts says that this is a "very stunning shortcoming" of modern "conservative" economics.

Even China, "the badboy of soaring economic growth and rapacious environmental destruction", is wising up by developing a companion metric to Gross Domestic Product that would measure the value of natural resources and healthy ecosystems. The states of Maryland and Vermont have actually adopted broad "Genuine Progress Indicators" to replace misleading Gross Domestic Product measures and take into account bigger picture concerns. It is basically insane to continue pursuing the same national policies we have in the past. Confirming such an assertion, Stanford University ecologist Gretchen Daily validly pointed out that it is folly for humankind to be "driving natural capital to its lowest level ever in human history."

Economist Herman Daly provided an alternative plan, proposing a "steady state" economy for countries that have achieved material wealth. Using tools like new carbon taxes on fossil fuels, a cap would be instituted on production and consumption so that these activities would not exceed Earth's capacity to replenish and cleanse itself, and goals of higher consumption in such a system would be replaced by more salubrious goals of achieving a better quality of life. Economist Herbert Stein succinctly said: "If something can't go on forever, it won't."

Another Aspect of Social Justice

"Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhumane."

--- Martin Luther King, Jr.

Emergency room care is the most expensive medical care available. It is downright stupid to have a medical system in which tens of millions of people can get care only in emergency rooms. Doctors tell people that good

primary care is the best way to stay healthy, and I strongly believe in the value of preventative health care and periodic medical check-ups, and a more pronounced emphasis on good nutrition programs and exercise rather than on prescription drugs and emergency treatments.

An estimated 45,000 people die every year because they don't have health insurance and thus are not able to obtain needed medical care, according to researchers at the Harvard Medical School. The system of healthcare in the U.S. is overly focused on profit making by health insurance companies and drug companies, instead of having a top concern of fairly providing for the health of American citizens. A mind-boggling total of $3.8 trillion was spent on healthcare in 2019 (before the spike in medical costs due to the pandemic). Of the huge amount of money spent every year on healthcare, the Institute of Medicine noted that in 2009, about $750 billion of that year's total spending was wasted on unneeded services, administrative inefficiencies and downright fraud. This was roughly 25% of total spending on healthcare. This is a system, the Institute compellingly stated, that has become "too complex and costly to continue business as usual."

This is not a good way to run a country. To obtusely stick with the system we have is foolhardy. It is crazy for conservatives to be indignant about the Affordable Care Act that President Obama spent great political capital to get enacted into law. Even Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts, after all, reluctantly agreed the law is Constitutional, and in June 2015 the Court further agreed that subsidies for the underprivileged are fair. This legislation represents a reasonable beginning toward coping with the high costs of healthcare in our nation, and dealing with supreme inequities and discrimination against the tens of millions of persons with "pre-existing conditions". Nonetheless Republican politicians and judges are making treacherous efforts to overturn the law.

Vastly better reforms are possible. A real good one is proposed in *Radically Simple Ways to Make America Fairer, and to Fix Both Social Security and Health Care So We Can Move On to Address Much Bigger Issues.*

Donald Trump created his own variety of political capital through sheer force of his demagoguery, greedy will and manipulative bullying. He is a malignant narcissist cult leader, a Trojan Horse for treachery, a con man who demands loyalty to himself, and maliciously uses intimidation to force others to make Faustian bargains.

The 2012 Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney notably made a glaring flip-flop on healthcare issues during his run for the presidency. When running for the Senate in 1994, he had declared support for universal healthcare, and had actually charged that having millions of people get "free care" from emergency rooms is "a form of socialism." Then, as Governor of Massachusetts in 2006, he laudably helped put a universal healthcare plan into effect in that state. In absurd contrast, he attacked the Affordable Care Act during his failed 2012 presidential campaign, even though this national plan was modeled on his own plan in Massachusetts. He even said that emergency room care is sufficient for the uninsured as their only form of healthcare. But the current system is extremely expensive, radically unjust and unwisely impractical -- and a very odd form of socialism!

Romney's flip-flops on healthcare are another of many instances of Republican politicians being opportunistically opposed to policies they had once advocated. One of their main motives for such opposition was to undermine President Obama. This obstruction of equitable compromise and bipartisan consensus-seeking and improved healthcare has characterized politics ever since the day President Obama first took the oath of office.

Here is yet another good reason for our representatives to work together for the common good. We need to seek a more reasonable agreement on how to solve problems, and give strong support to fair-minded people who are trying to improve our society! An insult hurling and character assassinating Donald Trump, who favors more advantages for rich people while deceiving people about this fact, was the wrong person to achieve this goal.

Economic Conundrums

A global financial crisis was precipitated in late 2008, after the investment bank Lehman Brothers suddenly went into bankruptcy. This urgent crisis made one thing obvious: that bankers had taken many risks that contributed to bringing the entire global economy down. Their actions forced governments worldwide to come to the rescue, with eager lobbying by inadequately regulated "too-big-to-fail" financial institutions. These bailouts cost trillions of dollars. It is difficult to comprehend the magnitude of this cost and the ramifications of having spent so much money to bail out the economy by rewarding those complicit in having manufactured the

crisis.

Even worse, the reforms undertaken in the wake of this crisis have not been adequate to reduce the risks of a *repeat* of this hyper-costly outcome. The banking industry has gotten even more highly concentrated, and entrenched interest groups have prevented the enactment of reasonable reforms or effective regulations, or of better oversight of risk-laden financial derivatives.

When banks and Wall Street entities become too big to fail, the average American on Main Street effectively becomes too small to matter. This outcome is too socially detrimental to accept!

A close look at our economic and political system shows that this crisis was NOT a mere accident. Specific incentives encouraged bankers to take excessive risks. "By the way, we have to fix that," as President Obama said, when referring to a different issue concerning reprehensible Republicans efforts to deprive poor people and minorities and students of their rights to vote. That issue involved concerted attempts to deny millions of underprivileged people fair representation of their best interests. It's stunning that so many people are forced to wait in absurdly long lines for hours and hours to cast their votes on Election Day. We should rightly fix that -- especially since in-person voting has become hazardous in the pandemic!

All these developments together are putting our democratic system of governance in peril. These are just a few of the troublesome facets of our dysfunctional political system, and of our merciless Shock Doctrine Disaster Capitalist economic system.

Consider the fact that no one has been held accountable for having caused the financial crisis that began with the bursting of the real estate bubble in 2008. "If no individual can be blamed for what has happened, it means that the problem lies in the economic and political system," writes Joseph Stiglitz. In effect, the wealthiest 2% of Americans have gotten away with the biggest heist in world history in the last 40 years. They have managed this scam by abusing the power of their Big Money influence to get Ronald Reagan to reduce top tax rates from 70% in 1980 to 28% by 1988. This radical reduction was not merely a tinkering with the tax code. And since then, amazingly, marginal tax rates on the highest incomes have been kept very low -- they were an inadequate rate of 35% from 2001 through the end of 2012. We can no longer afford this generosity!

A good plan for remedying this situation is proposed in the Fair Taxation Initiative contained in *One Dozen Big Initiatives to Positively Transform Our Societies*. I recommend a Salon-wise top tax rate increase to 48%.

Big Picture Economics and the Reboot Hypothesis

The study known as macroeconomics was brought into being in 1936 with the publication of *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* by John Maynard Keynes (pronounced 'caines'). This discipline was a big picture intellectual response to the widespread adversities caused by the calamitous Depression of the 1930s. The term *macroeconomics* initially referred to knowledge and expertise accumulated in hopes of understanding the causes of the Depression, so that a recurrence of that calamity could be prevented. Enough had been learned of what causes economic downturns that another depression was averted in the 1970s when a strong recovery was engineered after the 1973 oil crisis and subsequent recession.

Unfortunately, economists and politicians and ideologues then chose to forget what had been learned in the Depression. They repealed sensible banking legislation like the 1933 Glass-Steagall Act that had separated the safety of depository banks from the risk-taking of investment banks. Parts of the New Deal were undermined, and once again economic bubbles were stoked and regressive changes in taxation were implemented, and high levels of deficit spending began and continued, year after year after year.

Many people have experienced their computer or iPhone getting so messed up that the best thing to do is to reboot it. Recognizing how messed up our economic and political systems are, and how deeply moneyed interests have corrupted them, it sure seems like we should take bold steps to reboot. Thom Hartmann sagely stated in *Rebooting the American Dream: Eleven Ways to Rebuild Our Country:* "The solutions can be found by going back to the operating system designed by our Founding Fathers, and refined by both Democrats and Republicans -- until a virus called Reaganomics began to damage it, and subsequent attacks under both Bushes and even Clinton

weakened it further."

Thom Hartmann cogently expresses the opinion that we should reboot "to restore an America beset by problems like joblessness, declining wages, huge discrepancies in wealth, political corruption, environmental degradation, and corporate malfeasance." It is eminently reasonable to agree with this assessment, for high unemployment rates cause working people to be more insecure, and this in turn makes them more desperately willing to put up with more indignities than they would otherwise. They are basically compelled to go along with the rigged status quo, no matter how distressing. Insecurity has the insidious effect of forcing many workers to play a passive role in the serious game of Charades that accompanies the titanic struggle between Capital and Labor. This is a real story like the one of David versus Goliath.

"It is difficult to get a man to understand something, when his salary depends upon his not understanding it!"
--- Upton Sinclair

Relatively high joblessness represents a type of two-for-the-price-of-one bargain for big businesses. They get effective wage cost constraints, AND they get employees who are insecure, intimidated and compliant. Slick operators profit handsomely from the outcome, especially banking executives, financiers, CEOs, corporate lawyers, politicians, investors and rich "conservatives", all of whom are instrumental in having engineered the boom-and-bust cycles in the first place.

"Most working people are more concerned with making a living than with making history."
--- Paul Wellstone (paraphrased)

When one honestly "follows the money", it becomes obvious that giant corporations and their beneficiaries have managed to shift advantages much more heavily in their favor since 1980 in this hard-fought contest between Capital and Labor. It is high time we give underdogs better opportunities and fairer protections! Capitalists are especially successful in grabbing advantages and market share and government largess during economic shocks, as Naomi Klein makes clear in *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism.*

A salient point to remember in all discussions about national finances is that corporations, by hook or by crook, have managed to reduce the total share of federal tax revenues they pay from 40% of the total in the 1940s to an average of about 25% in the 1960s to less than 10% today. The direct consequence of this "success" is that the burden of taxation has been shifted to all other taxpayers -- and everyone in the future. Pay-as-we-go? That fiscally conservative notion seems to have become anathema to powerful interests, especially Republicans!

Economic issues are examined in greater detail throughout this Common Sense Revival. You will find my most important suggestions for improving our world in *One Dozen Big Initiatives to Positively Transform Our Societies.* Other essays like *Existence, Economics and Ecological Intelligence* online (and in Book Three of this manifesto) provide additional valuable insights and recommendations.

Is America the Greatest Country in the World?

I love our nation. But I do so liberally, not blindly. Think about a widely seen scene in the excellent program on HBO, *The Newsroom,* some years ago. A student asked news anchor Will McAvoy, a character played by Jeff Daniels, "Why is America the greatest country in the world?" His cogent response was that America is not "so star-spangled awesome":

"There is absolutely no evidence to support the statement that we're the greatest country in the world. We're seventh in literacy, twenty-seventh in math, twenty-second in science, forty-ninth in life expectancy, 178th in infant mortality, third in median household income, number four in labor force, and number four in exports. We lead the world in only three categories: number of citizens per capita that are incarcerated, number of adults who believe angels are real, and defense spending, where we spend more than the next twenty-six countries combined, twenty-five of whom are allies." After a poignant pause, McAvoy continued:

"We sure used to be. We stood up for what was right. We fought for moral reasons and we passed laws and struck down laws for moral reasons. We waged wars on poverty, not poor people. We sacrificed, we cared about our neighbors, we put our money where our mouths were, and we never beat our chest. We built great

big things, made ungodly technological advances, explored the universe, cured diseases, and cultivated the world's greatest artists and the world's greatest economy. We reached for the stars, acted like men. And we aspired to intelligence; we didn't belittle it; it didn't make us feel inferior. We didn't identify ourselves by who we voted for in the last election, and we didn't scare so easy. We were able to be all these things and do all these things because we were informed. By great men, men who were revered. The first step in solving any problem is recognizing there is one. America is not the greatest country in the world anymore."

More recently, Jeff Daniels declared that "Democracy is at stake" due to vital values being undermined -- values of honesty, decency, civility, compassion, respect for the rights of others, and fair protections for the American people against the relentless predations of domineering corporations and the wealthy.

A Critical, Independent and Investigative Press

A map showing the status of "Freedom of the Press" in every country in the world came to me from *Upworthy*. This Map of the World showed every nation in a color-coded synopsis that revealed relative freedom of the press allowed to its citizens. Canada, Germany and Scandanavian countries are shown in white, salubriously meaning "Good situation"; the United States, Australia and most of Western Europe enjoy a "Satisfactory situation." India, Italy, and much of Eastern Europe and South America have "Noticeable problems", and Mexico and Russia are coded red for "Difficult situation". Onerously, China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Somalia and Cuba suffer a "Very Serious situation". The terrorist shootings at the offices of the French satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo in Paris in January 2015 made it obvious that governments in Islamic nations must help marginalize violent extremists who oppose freedoms of the press and freedoms of religious beliefs.

Seeing this comprehensive summary of fredom of the press around the world, it becomes clear that most countries should strive to improve their ranking in this measure of fair governance. Greater freedoms of the press, and of protections for whistleblowers, are important because when these things are curtailed, then governments can more easily impose other oppressive measures on a populace, like restrictions on freedoms of speech and religious belief, and regressive changes in tax policies, and incursions against liberties and individual rights like those guaranteed in the Bill of Rights. The Trump administration not only threatened freedoms of expression in the United States, but also seriously undermined oversight, transparency and accountability.

Nelson Mandela put it clearly and succinctly: "A critical, independent and investigative press is the lifeblood of any democracy." In outrageous contrast, Donald Trump stated as a candidate that he would counter criticism by journalists and newspaper editorials by changing libel laws in a way that would undermine the first amendment and the freedom of the press. He declared: "One of the things I'm gonna do, and this is only gonna make it tougher for me, and I've never said this before, but one of the things I'm gonna do if I win … is I'm gonna open up our libel laws so when they write purposely negative and horrible and false articles, we can sue them and win lots of money." … "With me, they're not protected, because I'm not like other people … We're gonna open up those libel laws, folks, and we're gonna have people sue you like you never get sued before."

It's interesting that Trump thinks he's not like other people in this regard. In actuality, the U.S. Constitution says he is exactly like other people, because under the Constitution, all American citizens are supposedly equal under the law. "There is no Donald Trump Exception clause anywhere to be found. Even the Founding Fathers had to take their lumps from their critics. But we get where he is coming from -- the political milieu of fascism. Fascist dictators -- even wannabe fascist dictators -- cannot abide criticism."

Absolute authoritarian wannabe Trump hates criticism and frequently mocks and attacks the media. He is like the demagogue Joseph McCarthy, a Republican senator from Wisconsin who corrupted political discourse in the early 1950s during his first term in office by using falsehoods and innuendo to inflame public fears of communism, and ruthlessly manipulating people's emotions. He was brought down because Edward R. Murrow, a courageous journalist, understood that a bully like McCarthy could not be dealt with by traditional reporting.

Nancy Conway observed that "Our democracy relies on an informed citizenry. Thoughtful, fair, balanced, comprehensive reporting in print and in photos or video may be the best way to know what's going on -- the way

to best inform ourselves. Information is what keeps us free from tyranny." In sharp contrast to this idea, misinformation can torpedo our ship of state.

The Value of Freedom of the Press

"Time and again, we have seen power-hungry leaders of other countries chip away at the freedom and independence of the press, threatening their citizens' access to critical information. These democratically elected leaders know that they must neutralize or co-opt the press to eliminate a check on the government and pave the way for them to increase their power and cause their countries to 'back-slide' into autocratic regimes. These leaders also know that the suppression of the press and the transformation from democracy to autocracy does not occur overnight. Rather, these democratically elected leaders follow a 'playbook' pursuant to which they slowly and methodically (1) undermine the public's trust in the press, (2) block access to press organizations viewed as critical of the regime, (3) harm the interests of the owners of disfavored press organizations, and (4) punish or otherwise censor disfavored journalists and press organizations. History shows that when democratic leaders employ this playbook in a systematic effort to control the press, their countries do not remain democracies for long."

"President Trump's repeated deployment of government power against the press -- unprecedented in modern times in this country -- replicates the playbook used by strong-man leaders and their allies in Hungary, Poland, Russia, Turkey, and elsewhere to erode the democratic institutions in those countries." Trump has followed this playbook of authoritarian actions, waging war against the media's credibility (declaring it "fake news"), calling independent press "the enemy of the people", and blocking access of critical outlets and journalists and attacking businesses like AT&T and Amazon, and threatening or punishing media outlets.

"Trump's reaction on Twitter to the New York Times story detailing more than $1 billion of losses he claimed on his tax returns in the 1980s and '90s was illuminating. Flip-flopping like a beached trout, Trump first dismissed the story as something everyone has known for ages -- 'very old information' -- then boasted that all great real estate developers dodged taxes in those days -- 'it was sport' -- before dismissing the whole thing as a 'Fake News hit job!' He confirmed it, explained it, bragged about it and denied it in the space of a couple of tweets."

Democrats have trouble remembering the two rules of Trump. First, he thrives on conflict. He reportedly told senior aides from the start that every day of his presidency should be a TV show in which he battles rivals and wins. Second, he believes that elections are won by dominating the spotlight. "It's not the polls. It's the ratings," he explained in 2016.

In the tumultuous throes of the global pandemic in 2020, Trump took the stage in the White House briefing room almost every day for weeks to spin a bizarre succession of stories, boasting and deceiving, and contradicting his own health experts -- and blaming others for his lethally pathetic performance in the crisis. After he recommended ingesting disinfectants to cope with COVID-19, even Republicans timidly distanced themselves from his hope-y quackery. Trump actually said, "Supposing we hit the body with a tremendous, whether it's ultraviolet or just very powerful light … And then I see the disinfectant. Where it knocks it out in a minute, one minute, and is there a way we can do something like that by injections inside or almost a cleaning, cause you see it gets on the lungs and it does a tremendous number on the lungs." Bizarro!

Trump declared during COVID briefings that he has absolute authority, but no responsibility. He chose to delegate responsibility to state governors to handle many matters, but refused to provide needed funds for state and local governments to give first responders higher pay to help cope with the pandemic. He even infamously promoted an antimalarial drug as a possible miracle cure, like a snake oil huckster salesman. And he declared he would stop providing funding to the World Health Organization right in the middle of the worst global pandemic since 1918. This was a reactive effort to scapegoat the organization to distract the American people from his administration's deadly mishandling of the carnage being caused by the coronavirus crisis. This action was "*Unthinkable*. Yet this is just another example of the Trump administration putting politics before people's lives." This politicizing of safety measures was all but criminal.

Trump Republican scandals are so pervasive and all consuming of people's attention that they suck the oxygen

out of the room and divert attention from the real treachery that was committed against the public by undermining the social safety net and environmental protections, and public health, public education, reproductive rights, domestic tranquility, the general welfare, checks and balances, national security, the prospects for survival of humanity in the future and indeed all other forms of life on Earth.

The political party of the self-proclaimed Moral Majority has become the influence-abusing party of moral turpitude, anti-egalitarian self-interest, betrayals of public trust, and discriminatory white supremacy.

Recall again that Mark Twain's ultimate test of true patriotism was loyalty to the country and the Constitution and the virtuous values they represent, and not the tawdry gilded variety of false patriotism that Trump demands of loyalty to him and his cronies in office, even though he is a demagogue and master manipulator who demands unwavering loyalty to himself and his scheming anti-democratic authority-abusing political party.

Like America Firsters in Charles Lindbergh's fictitious fascist presidency during the early 1940s, as told in *The Plot Against America*, today's deceived Trump supporters and opponents of expansive healthcare for all, and assorted religious fundamentalists and gun zealots, pretend they are patriots while they help enable a backward despotic agenda and give unwitting support to the appointment of right-wing judges who will likely decide most issues in favor of abusers of power rather than the people, for decades to come.

An Assessment of the Intelligence of Economic Policies

Historical events can provide both valuable illumination and cautionary guidance. Two nations have demonstrated notable success in the best way to create a growing middle class. In Brazil, 40 million people were moved from the ranks of poverty to the middle class between 2002 and 2010, and extreme poverty was significantly reduced. This progress was achieved by implementing a smart economic strategy that expanded access to public education, improved economic security, increased access to credit, reduced income inequality, and promoted social mobility. The burgeoning size of the middle class in Brazil drove a boom in business, so these initiatives stimulated demand for products and services and fueled economic growth and created many jobs.

Brazil's strategy was a much better plan than the U.S. trickle-down ideology of cutting taxes on rich people so that they might stimulate the economy by investing in businesses and spending money on luxury consumer goods, yachts, vacation homes and speculative investments. Robust demand created by a prosperous middle class is a key to business creation and job creation, especially in the U.S. where consumers do 70% of all spending. Businesses need a broad base of people who can afford to buy their products. This is one reason that social policies that have the effect of eviscerating the middle class and slashing support for the working poor are generally wrongheaded.

The net result of our national policies in the past 40 years has been a significant increase in inequalities, and a poverty rate that is near the highest level in generations. In contrast, the upshot of Brazil's fair and intelligent policies (before the ruthless autocrat Jair Bolsonaro came to power) was to achieve goals we should aspire to: strengthening the middle class, reducing poverty, and diminishing inequalities between rich and poor.

Political corruption and then the ascendancy of a right-wing populist have unfortunately derailed Brazil's success in the recent years, and inflation and interest rates have been soaring, and falling oil and commodity prices have led to economic hardships. It is obviously unacceptably risky to allow entrenched corruption by business and political elites, and legislative graft, and fiscally improvident mismanagement -- and the politicizing of public health during the pandemic. Let's heed this cautionary tale! Heed also risks inherent in right wing takeovers of vulnerable countries, like that occasioned by the Trumpian demagogic leader Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil.

Helping to Ensure the General Welfare

The second country that provides clear evidence that smarter national policies can contribute to the greater good is the United States itself, during the period from 1945 to 1980. The national policies implemented during this 35-year period helped create a vibrant middle class by paying G.I. Bill benefits for returning servicemen and large public investments in higher education and construction of an extensive interstate highway system.

To pay for these initiatives while having record levels of debt incurred in fighting World War II, marginal tax rates on the highest levels of income were 70% or higher each and every year.

Ronald Reagan's actions to slash these rates to 28% are the upshot of conservatives always lobbying insistently for lower rates. Mitt Romney and Paul Ryan staunchly contended in 2012 that 25% would be a fairer marginal rate than the then-current 35%. They claimed that cutting taxes on high incomes and profitable corporations is the only acceptable national plan, despite the facts of what really constitute the greater good. Almost every Republican politician mindlessly echoes blind faith in these ideologies and marches like lemmings to the same shrewd and sycophantic calculus.

As debt in countries worldwide has become excessive, it becomes clear that this regressive debt-financed tax-cutting ruse can no longer be acceptable, as British Prime Minister Liz Truss found out after her attempt to give rich people more tax breaks upon assuming office.

American politicians often use devious talking points and carefully orchestrated deceptions to gain support for policies favorable to elite constituencies. For instance, the super-rich often cite the loss of family farms when trying to justify lower taxes on the two-tenths of 1% of inherited estates that are big enough to be subject to any estate tax at all. The fact is, however, that lower inheritance taxes exclusively benefit the richest Americans -- and only relatively few family farmers. If we truly want to create a meritocracy rather than an aristocracy of inherited wealth and privilege, we need a well-designed progressive tax on large estates. Reductions in estate taxes since 2001 have been one of several ruses that have served to shift the burden of taxation from the richest people to everyone else, and to cause the national debt to skyrocket.

Not only do the 400 richest Americans have more wealth than the bottom 180 million combined, but the U.S. has the highest inequality of wealth in the industrialized world. Globally, the richest 2% of people own more than half of all assets. These are sobering facts. In the long run, extreme inequalities like this serve to create a risky state of affairs for everyone. Policies that make most Americans more insecure and more stressed and more desperate are downright dumb, because turning up the heat on a pressure cooker that has an improperly designed pressure-release valve is exceedingly ill advised!

The extraordinarily successful billionaire businessman and investor Warren Buffett has repeatedly pointed out the folly of having a tax system in which people who make millions of dollars pay much lower tax rates than their secretaries. Wealthy people pay a much lower percentage of their incomes because they have used their outsized influence to get excessively favorable tax treatment for capital gains compared to rates assessed on wages. Unyielding ideological arguments are adduced by representatives of rich conservatives to keep taxes low on income earned from owning capital assets. It seems outrageous, however, for people who work hard for their money to be required to pay higher tax rates on their earned incomes than people who get money from business profits or investments in stocks or real estate. Those who inherit large sums of money, common sense tells us, or those who have accumulated it due to unfair aspects of our capitalist system, should be required to pay rates on their incomes that are at least as high as the rates paid by working people!

Warren Buffett has also sagely observed that opportunity and motivation are stifled by regressive tax plans. He testified to the Senate Finance Committee in 2007 in defense of federal estate taxes. He invoked the historical roots of these taxes, which were established in 1916 to prevent anti-democratic concentrations of wealth and power. "Dynastic wealth, the enemy of meritocracy, is on the rise," Buffett told the panel. "Equality of opportunity has been on the decline. A meaningful progressive estate tax is needed to curb the movement of a democracy toward plutocracy." He added: "Tax-law changes have benefited this super-rich group, including me, in a huge way." It is time to reverse these changes by re-instituting higher estate taxes. Contrarily, Republicans are pushing to eliminate these taxes altogether. Political corruption obviously thrives in the USA!

Republican President Theodore Roosevelt made an important declaration in his New Nationalism Speech in 1910: "The really big fortune, the swollen fortune, by the mere fact of its size, acquires qualities which differentiate it in kind, as well as in degree, from what is possessed by men of relatively small means. Therefore, I believe in a graduated income tax on big fortunes, and in another tax which is far more easily collected and far more

effective: that is, a graduated inheritance tax on big fortunes, properly safeguarded against evasion, and increasing rapidly in amount with the size of the estate."

The Follies of Militarism

Another pathetic aspect of the American capitalist system is the hyper-stimulus of spending on arms and the military. This was one of the central pillars of the Reagan Revolution. This gambit primarily benefitted the few at the expense of the many. Ramped-up spending on the military generates huge profits for special interest groups invested in arms manufacturing and war services industries in the military-industrial complex. Wealthy people, CEOs and big shareholders are the main beneficiaries of these profits, and these people are being granted a very costly entitlement of paying taxes on these windfalls at very low capital gains rates.

Mark Twain had declared he was an anti-imperialist and wrote scathing words about the American intervention in the Philippines during the Philippine-American War between 1898 and 1902. Terrible atrocities took place during that offensive against Philippine nationalists who were fighting for independence.

General Smedley D. Butler -- you gotta love that name! -- was purportedly the most decorated Marine in U.S. history at the time of his death in 1940. General Butler expressed deep regrets at the end of his heroic military career about the role he had played in wars. In speeches and a book titled *War Is A Racket,* he stated that war is a racket "conducted for the benefit of the very few, at the expense of the very many." … "It is possibly the oldest racket, and easily the most profitable, and surely the most vicious. It is the only one international in scope. It is the only one in which the profits are reckoned in dollars and the losses in lives."

Not long after Smedley Butler spoke these words about the war racket, the bitter seeds of World War II began to sprout. History tells us that the German war machine was partially fueled by U.S. business interests, and was financed in part by American bankers like Prescott Bush, the father of George H.W. Bush and grandfather of George W. Bush. This fact really taints any claimed righteous integrity of the influence of the Bush family in our national politics!

The United States has spent an amount on the military since World War II that is roughly equal to the record level of the total national debt today, so one way of seeing this situation could be that we have basically borrowed the total amount of money spent on wars and the military. Military spending serves two main unspoken purposes -- to protect U.S. business interests abroad and to enhance opportunities for entrenched interest groups to maximize profit making by entities involved in military-industrial complex activities. Considering this fact, it would be smart to require military spending to be financed partially by taxes on outsized profits earned by businesses involved in war services and munitions sales, and by higher taxes on interest groups like Big Oil that primarily benefit from military interventions in oil-producing regions.

High levels of spending on the military make it much easier for the U.S. to project domineering power around the globe. This power is often used to defend interests of financial elites and giant multinational corporations, and to ensure access to oil and natural resources of other countries around the world, and to enforce economic and political shock-doctrine policies and too-big-to-fail banking schemes and other "free-market" doctrines.

General Douglas MacArthur made this insightful observation in 1952: "It is a part of the general pattern of misguided policy that our country is now geared to an arms economy, which was bred in an artificially induced psychosis of war hysteria and nurtured upon an incessant propaganda of fear."

Military adventurism serves to distract people's attention from domestic issues, and divert financial resources from them. By exploiting nationalistic, ethnocentric and hawkish patriotic impulses, such diversions keep people from rising up and demanding fairer domestic policies. High spending on the military represents a misallocation of funds that has the effect of crowding out other investments. Many alternative investments would provide much better outcomes from the point of view of society as a whole. Especially good ideas can be found in well-managed investments in public education, research and development, cleaner energy, public transportation, infrastructure improvements, a more secure social safety net, and saner environmental protections.

This is an age-old "guns versus butter" debate that has roiled politics for generations. Hear John Steinbeck, who wrote the following words in his *Log from the Sea of Cortez* during the expedition he made in 1940 with his wonderful philosophic friend Doc Ed Ricketts: "There is a war now which no one wants to fight, in which no one can see a gain: a zombie war of sleep-walkers which nevertheless goes on out of all control of intelligence. Some time ago a Congress of honest men refused an appropriation of *several hundreds of millions of dollars* to feed our people. They said, and meant it, that the economic structure of the country would collapse under the pressure of such expenditure. And now the same men, just as honestly, are devoting *many billions* to the manufacture, transportation, and detonation of explosives to protect the people they would not feed."

Dwight D. Eisenhower made a similarly compelling statement in 1953, with these words: "Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children. This is not a way of life at all in any true sense. Under the cloud of threatening war, it is humanity hanging from a cross of iron."

Social critic Dick Gregory deepened this understanding by once making this entertainingly astute observation: "I don't know why America always thinks she has to run all around the world forcing people to take our way of governance at the barrel of a gun. When you've got something really good, you don't have to force it on people. ***They will steal it!"***

Zing! -- I love that concept! Notably, the United States wants to share more than our way of government with other countries. We want them to agree to honor "free market" competition, corporate-friendly international trade agreements, laissez-faire governance, easy movements of capital around the world, and uninterrupted U.S. dominance of international affairs. These things often turn out to be distinctly disadvantageous to developing countries in a variety of ways. Free access for our banks and industries in other nations creates many problems, and foreign governments are forced to collaborate with the U.S. in managing the crises that crop up as a result. And we give fodder to those radical rascals who contend that the U.S. often acts like a ruthlessly aggressive imperialistic nation.

Aggression in military might and rash debt financing are socially undesirable schemes that are compounded by correlated increases in inequities and the subversion of democratic fairness. Amoral abuses of power by big corporations and the political right make this state of affairs worse. My personal bias tells me that supposedly conservative politicians, in particular, have been abusing their civic responsibilities by staunchly advocating retrogressive policies. And Trump was a calamity in this regard. Broader and deeper perspectives on military issues can be found in *Reflections on War – and Peace!* -- see online, or in Book Six of the Earth Manifesto.

<u>Constructive Criticism and Visionary Understandings</u>

Many supporters of the U.S. military involvement in the Vietnam War gave withering criticism to peace activists, war dissidents, conscientious objectors and whistleblowers. "Love It or Leave It," they declared. They accused former military analyst Daniel Ellsberg of being "the most dangerous man in America" for having released the infamous Pentagon Papers. These documents valuably revealed that the U.S. government routinely suppressed crucial information and used deceptions, false pretexts and outright lies to sell the Vietnam War to the American people. The federal government also spied on and intimidated and punished dissenters to advance its misguided military goals, a fact that is anti-democratic and deeply disturbing.

> "A lie can travel halfway around the world while the truth is putting on its shoes."
>
> --- Mark Twain

Honest and constructive criticism is of great value, especially in matters that concern highly inequitable social policies and unjust abuses of power, and the folly of hyper-costly arms races and shortsighted thinking in ecological matters. A convincing case can be made that good governance relies on civil debate, broad-minded dissent, boldly expressed concerns for the true public interest and farsighted understandings that are expressed by ethical journalists and honest leaders. It is right and proper that inspectors general and

conscientious whistleblowers are protected in their abilities to courageously expose fraud, corruption and deceit. Some conservatives, in contrast, seem to conveniently regard these honorable things as subversive.

"You measure a democracy by the freedom it gives its dissidents", said political activist Abbie Hoffman, "not the freedom it gives its assimilated conformists."

Let me tell you an entertaining and illuminating story concerning some of John Steinbeck's wise observations. Here is an excerpt from *Tall Tales, Provocative Parables, Luminous Clarity and Evocative Truths: A Modern Log from the Sea of Cortez:*

> Sometimes there is a natural serendipity of cause and effect. On these rare occasions, the unintended consequences of activities actually turn out to be salubrious. Don't you love it when this happens? How sweet it is! Consider, as an interesting instance, the circumstances that surrounded a tuna fishery that John Steinbeck describes in his *Log from the Sea of Cortez.* The fishermen of Cabo San Lucas, the town that lies on the southern tip of the Baja Peninsula, once caught great quantities of tuna. The tuna were canned in a cannery on the pier, and the fish guts and cuttings of the tuna were thrown into the bay from the end of the pier. This refuse brought in schools of small fish, which were then netted and used for bait to catch more tuna. Voila, a closed circle, and perfectly fortuitous good luck!
>
> There was, however, a proverbial fly in this otherwise "perfect ecological ointment". The schools of fish were driven away from the pier by black cormorants, which are big gangly birds that dove into the bay to catch the small fish. "Thus", writes Steinbeck, "they are considered interlopers, radicals, subversive forces against the perfect and God-set balance on Cape San Lucas. And they are rightly slaughtered, as all radicals should be. As one of our number remarked, <Why, pretty soon they'll want to vote.>"
>
> Steinbeck scholars indicate that the modest and soft-spoken author was sensitive to creatures being considered subversives for a cogent personal reason: his novels like *The Grapes of Wrath* had achieved great fame, and this had brought him notoriety, hate mail and even surveillance by the FBI. His literary themes were unsettling to the privileged, who feared anyone poignantly pointing out the social problems related to poor people and the plight of immigrants and farm workers, or startling contrasts in economic inequities, or other failings of the ruthless dog-eat-dog capitalist system. Great literature evokes universal themes and images, so it provides deeper contexts in which readers can more viscerally understand. It is sometimes 'subversive' of the status quo, but it is even more valuable for being so!

The "love it or leave it" crowd of apologists for military interventions by the United States started going off the rails when we had a smart and somewhat progressive black man as president. Deep paranoia seems to afflict people who have been indoctrinated to fear the federal government, and conservatives have been peddling the story that "the government is the problem" since Ronald Reagan told them so. These folks contend, for instance, that restrictions on gun sales are a threat to people's liberties. This is why many of them staunchly oppose background checks on all gun sales and sensible restrictions on the ownership of assault weapons and high-capacity ammunition clips. Gun sales were at record highs during Barack Obama's tenure in office, and with fears fomented by the right-wing fringe running deep, a correlated opposition to compromise and good solutions to gun violence problems virulently obstructed collaborative reforms for safety.

When conservatives in the 1960s told liberals to love America or leave it, they charged conscientious objectors and proponents of peace with <u>a lack of patriotism</u> *for not blindly following the federal government* in support of the Vietnam War. Today, when gun rights enthusiasts defend unrestricted access to guns and assault weapons, they rationalize their rigid stances by asserting a need to possess an arsenal of weapons *in case they need to fight the government with lethal force.* This blatantly hypocritical contradiction has deep roots, stimulated by fear mongering, and we should try honestly to better understand them -- and to counteract their influence.

Maybe some light is shed on this issue by the actions of domestic extremists in Oregon in January 2016. Armed militia groups from outside the state occupied the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon, thereby putting an important wildlife refuge at risk. The unfortunate occupation violated the most basic principles of the Public Trust Doctrine by holding public lands and resources hostage to serve an illiberal political agenda of the

occupiers. The militia used a flimsy pretext to justify their actions, which involved two local ranchers being convicted and jailed for arson and poaching on public lands. Notably, neither the local community nor the individuals convicted had requested or endorsed the occupation or the assistance of militia groups.

Trump Provides a Startling Perspective

Donald Trump made many outrageous moves like trying to ban Muslims from coming to the United States and mercilessly separating migrant children from their parents. In doing so, he helped drive Republican politicians further to the right. A serious paucity of civility has resulted, as was witnessed on the debate stage in Las Vegas on December 15th, 2015, when every Republican candidate strived to scapegoat immigrants and harshly denigrate President Obama. They all decried "political correctness" in their fervor to get on the groupthink bandwagon of blaming Muslims for the terrorist tactics of Islamic extremists, even though this folly plays into the hands of recruiters for reactionary and terrorist causes on social media, who take advantage of deeply disaffected individuals to promote fanatical violence or jihad "holy war"..

But look here! Trump's arrogant and insulting character freed him to say things during his 2016 election campaign that no other Republican would consider. Here is a sensational one, which happens to ring with a tenor of ideology-transcending truth. This was a remarkably blunt denunciation of the Iraq War that Trump made during the Republican candidate's debate in December 2015. Listen in:

> "We've spent $4 trillion trying to topple various people that, frankly, if they were there and if we could have spent that $4 trillion in the United States to fix our roads, our bridges, and all of the other problems -- our airports and all the other problems we have -- we would have been a lot better off, I can tell you that right now. We have done a tremendous disservice not only to the Middle East -- we've done a tremendous disservice to humanity. The people that have been killed, the people that have been wiped away -- and for what? It's not like we had victory. It's a mess. The Middle East is totally destabilized, a total and complete mess. I wish we had the 4 trillion dollars or 5 trillion dollars. I wish it were spent right here in the United States on schools, hospitals, roads, airports, and everything else that are all falling apart!"

Andrew Prokop wrote: "Trump has identified an opportunity left open by the polarized two-party system. By pairing his tough rhetoric and persona and avowed nationalism with various efforts to play to Americans' racial anxieties on immigration and terrorism, he can convincingly tell conservatives the Iraq War has been a disaster. And here again, he may come off to voters as more honest and straight-talking than the other candidates."

An Interlude of Mental Calisthenics

Here's an interesting exercise for the inquiring mind. Alert! What individuals do you think have had the most far-reaching impacts on humanity in the last two centuries? Here's my conjecture: Charles Darwin, Sigmund Freud and Albert Einstein. Charles Darwin gave us startling insights into the biological evolution of life on Earth through the processes of natural selection. Sigmund Freud revealed some early ideas about the subconscious psychological nature of human drives and the complex workings of the human brain. And the visionary Albert Einstein provided us with brilliantly abstruse understandings of spacetime physics, along with some real valuable philosophical perspectives.

Remarkably, Albert Einstein and Sigmund Freud collaborated together in 1932 in an exchange of letters related to issues of war and politics. The Institute for Intellectual Cooperation had invited Einstein to undertake a correspondence with any thinker of his choice in the world. Einstein chose Sigmund Freud, and he began by proposing an idea that he had been refining over the years. To reduce risks of war, he contended, required nations to surrender some of their sovereignty to a "supranational organization competent to render verdicts of incontestable authority and enforce absolute submission to the execution of its verdicts." He was basically recommending that a new international body should be created that has more authority than the ineffective League of Nations, which had been organized after the horrible devastation of the First World War.

Who are we to dispute with one of the most brilliant minds in history, a man who has conceived the Biggest Picture perspective of the universe ever imagined? Let's give the United Nations more power and funding, and work together to make the world a safer, more peaceable place.

Einstein and Freud concluded their correspondence with an observation that instinctively aggressive drives are too central to our human nature to be effectively suppressed. Not long thereafter, a rude confirmation of this assertion was to arrive. Adolph Hitler came to power in Germany in 1933, nearly coinciding with the time this correspondence between Einstein and Freud was published. By then, many countries were already working feverishly to improve the destructive capabilities of their armaments, and the most lethal war in human history was in the early stages of unfolding.

Curiously, Einstein and Freud may have been wrong in one regard. Modern evolutionary biologists say that, in the biggest picture understanding of human evolution, cooperation has played an even more significant role in the differential survival of human clans than ruthlessly aggressive competition. In any case, as biographer Walter Isaacson noted, "Einstein, like a good scientist, was by then revising his theories based on new facts."

All hopes for a "supranational organization" were put off until after World War II ended in 1945. Then the United Nations was established, and it has done a commendable job of articulating a Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and of working for international peace and combating diseases and promoting environmental sanity, among many other important accomplishments. Many nations worldwide still have not been willing to give the UN more generous funding or adequate power, but this serves to reinforce understandings that Einstein was right when he called for a more powerful international organization to help ensure peaceful conflict resolution.

Cultural change proceeds at a much faster pace than the biological evolution of human genes, so cultural evolution offers us better hopes for our being able to actually choose a more auspicious future. Cultural adaptation has been especially beneficial through good contributions made by civic organizations, mutual trade collaboration, fair rules of law, democratic governance, non-governmental organizations, the value of greater understandings, and the many blessings of peaceful coexistence.

Corporations began their transformation into multinational organizations long ago, but a dramatic acceleration has taken place in recent decades as globalization trends have allowed many of these entities to sprawl beyond the control of national governments. There are some positive aspects of this rapidly progressing development, and one is this: it is causing us to become more aware of our being interconnected and interdependent. This is why Albert Einstein was correct in saying that humanity's best hope for a saner civilization resides in some form of international laws that all nations agree on -- with more reasonable compromises to be made by all.

In April 2013, the General Assembly of the United Nations approved the first international treaty ever to regulate the multibillion-dollar global arms trade. Overwhelming support was shown for the proposal, with only three rogue nations opposing the treaty. Attention! Which three? Oh, yes, those rogue nations, Iran and Syria and North Korea. What do you think the chances are that the U.S. Senate would ratify this treaty? Experts and pundits alike said, "No way!" Ratification in the Senate was unlikely for the simple reason that ratification of treaties requires a two-thirds majority of Senators, and too many of our representatives in Congress are beholden to following the dictates of Big Money, the arms industry and the reactionary uncompromising NRA.

It is a bizarre curiosity that one group of Americans joined Iran, Syria and North Korea in opposition to this smart-minded treaty. Tarnation! -- which one? -- Ah, yes, of course, it was the NRA. Perhaps the NRA should be designated a terrorist organization! After the worst shooting massacre in modern American history in Las Vegas, this characterization rang truer, and many mass shootings since then (like the one at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Florida) have brought closer scrutiny to the NRA's intransigence and nefarious influence.

Albert Einstein was repulsed by ultra-nationalism and German militarism from the early days of his youth. He felt compelled to renounce his German citizenship in 1896 when he was 17 years old, after he had moved to Switzerland to attend college at Zurich Polytechnic. His belief in a new supranational organization that would be effective in transcending the militant aspects of national sovereignty was a reflection of his pacifist views. It stands to reason that a better-empowered international entity would be a good way to resolve disputes and prevent war. This idea has merit! Let's demand that our leaders ratify the agreement on the global arms trade.

Investigating One of the Most Serious of All Environmental Risks

Capitalist economic systems are good at producing goods and services, and at hyper-promoting the consumption of these things, and at making energetic efforts to maximize profits. This is generally detrimental to the environmental commons and the prospects of our heirs. Most scientists believe that climate change caused by human activities is probably the most serious environmental concern facing humanity.

The U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change called climate change "the defining challenge of our age" in its Fourth Assessment Report on global warming trends. The time has come for us to collaborate together to deal effectively with this ominous problem. Extreme weather events in the United States have cost American families, businesses and the federal government many hundreds of billions of dollars in the last five years alone. The year 2017 proved to be exceptionally calamitous. As we spew more greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, "natural disasters" are going to become more frequent, and more costly. It would be smart for us to take bold precautionary measures NOW to deal with this issue, so comprehensive climate legislation should be passed that assesses a fee on carbon pollution emissions. The revenue generated should be used to fund investments in energy efficiency and sustainable energy technologies that generate cleaner power from wind, solar, geothermal heat and biomass. I encourage readers to peruse my essay *Climate Change Considerations, Carrying Capacity, and Ecological Overshoot* for broader understanding of related issues.

Another Economic Conundrum of Capitalism

There is another big problem with our system of democratic capitalism: It has become more like a plutocracy in the past four decades. Vested interests have succeeded in getting our representatives to reduce taxes on income from corporate dividends and capital gains to very low rates, so that rich people pay low effective rates on their huge incomes. This is an outrageous contrast to the much higher percentages that ordinary Americans pay in taxes on wages they earn from working for a living, so it is simply wrong. The top 1% of taxpayers receives more than two-thirds of all capital gains, so the low 15% tax rate on capital gains is mainly a benefit to this small fraction of Americans. It would be much fairer to assess taxes on capital gains at the same rate as ordinary income. This should be one of many reforms that should be made to the U.S. tax code.

Wealthy people are members of what Robert Frank once called "Richistan". These people have been getting their way at the expense of everyone else for decades. They achieve this narrow felicity through the simple expediency of politically corrupting our democratic republic. Instead of working to make our society fairer, many of our political representatives pander mainly to big corporations and the demands of the wealthiest 1% of Americans, helping them maximize their financial rewards at the expense of others.

The bottom line of these tax system shenanigans has been a rapid increase in the national debt from less than $1 trillion in 1980 to over $31 trillion in October 2022. This trend is mainly caused by ploys that are fiscally irresponsible and generationally unfair. It is a mortgaging of future generations that is creating one of the biggest risks to the security of the American people in our country's history. This excessive level of debt is providing powerful impetus to the politics of austerity. And, if it continues to be inadequately controlled, this failure could easily lead to an international debt crisis that could cause extensive adversities to billions of people worldwide. Surely, we would be well advised to take sensible, courageous and effective steps to avert such a possibility! Republicans and obsequious Trump loyalists refuse to acknowledge and ameliorate these risks!

It is no wonder that many people almost hate our political system when elections are approaching, due to fear mongering in political ads and blaming, scapegoating, negative spin, character assassinations and deceptive arguments. On top of this costly barrage of persuasion, obnoxiously incessant fund-raising appeals make it ever clearer that serious campaign finance reform is needed. Also, the knowledge that our political system and governance are so corrupted by Big Money tends to make the majority of the people cynical about fairness of representation in our politics. It is discouraging to see that our elected representatives too often dash our hopes of having them really champion our personal and collective best interests.

A True Pro-Life Perspective

Mainstream politics in the 21st century has become, to a large degree, a "sham battle" between people who take opposing sides on hot button social issues. This conflict distracts people from bigger problems. We have far

more serious concerns to quarrel over than hot button social issues!

The most blatant examples of cultural anger generated by barrages of attack ads and manipulative persuasion are those relating to anti-abortion activists and anti-immigrant passions. Dividers have generated intense fervor by provoking these passions, and they have shrewdly exploited these emotions to achieve their real underlying goal -- of ensuring that wealthy people are allowed to continue to control and dictate our national priorities.

Conservative cultural anger seems to be, in part, a reactive backlash against desegregation laws and women having been given reproductive rights in the *Roe vs. Wade* decision on abortion rights. Anger has also been fomented against collective bargaining rights for public employees, and against increasing trends toward allowing gay people to have fair civil rights, and against sensible gun safety initiatives. Frustrations and anger have been aroused against scapegoated Big Government, in general. Intolerance, racism, sexism and ideological myopia also play a part in these attitudes.

Astonishing ironies have resulted from this emotional hijacking of the American people, and from the radical rightward tilt of the Republican Party. Hard-line conservatives have grown increasingly opposed to abortion, even in cases of rape or incest. These partisans piously proclaim that they are "pro-life". But at the same time they push policies that are extensively contrary to the true sanctity of life, and to the real cause of liberty, and to a better quality of life for those alive at this moment in time.

> "Respect for life has to include respect for how that life is lived, enhanced and protected -- not only at the moment of conception but afterward, in the course of that life."
>
> --- Thomas L. Friedman, *Why I am Pro-Life*

Stubbornly uncompromising Republican stances against abortion not only drastically diminish women's rights, but also are puritanical, prudish, misogynistic, and excessive in imposing male patriarchal control over females. From this standpoint, they are reactionary and morally wrong. When such "pro-life" people claim they believe in the sanctity of life, they ignore the fact that, if life were to be honestly regarded as sacred, any policies that contribute to impoverishment of people who are already alive (like mothers and children) would be abhorrent.

Conservatives tend to oppose universal healthcare and support the death penalty, and obstruct sensible laws to limit access to semi-automatic assault weapons. They are generally eager to eliminate many programs that help people lead healthier and more secure lives. Many of them even oppose sensible protections of the environment, and pollution prevention laws, and reasonable ways of dealing with climate change. These stances undermine our national well-being, and threaten countless species of life on Earth.

"Look." Tens of thousands of women die every year in countries where safe abortions are not legal, and many women have abortions that are performed in unsafe conditions. In Nigeria, where abortions are against the law (with the sole exception of when the procedure is necessary to save a woman's life), thousands of women die every year from complications resulting from unsafe abortions. The real effect of anti-abortion policies imposed by Republican politicians is to condemn many pregnant women to death, and to make tens of thousands of them and their doctors into criminals, and to force hundreds of thousands of women into having babies they do not want. In light of the fact that 85% of women who get abortions in the U.S. every year are unmarried, outlawing abortion is a mercilessly extreme form of lethally dangerous policy that disproportionately puts unmarried women's lives at risk. It is beyond outrageous to force women to risk their lives to satisfy hard right ideologues.

Nigeria has a land area less than 12 percent the size of the contiguous 48 states, yet it has 218 million people, or over 60% as many as the United States. If the U.S. population had almost quadrupled in the last 50 years, like Nigeria's has done, there would be something like 800 million Americans today instead of 333 million, and there would be commensurate need for much more Big Government to control the masses, and to deal with the widespread problems that such numbers would create. And the blatant stupidity of pro-embryo, pro-birth, anti-women's rights policies would be that much more colossally absurd.

If the density of the U.S. population was as great as the density of people living in Nigeria (218 million people in 357 million square miles), then there would be almost 2 billion Americans instead of 333 million in the U.S., and

just try to imagine the traffic alone!

Our great strength lies in unity, not in rule by divide-to-conquer authoritarians, so we should act to prevent Big Money from subverting our democracy and allowing shrewdly Machiavellian machinations by political operatives to divide us asunder. I feel strongly that a sincere and truly moral pro-life stance is the only sensible and honorable one to espouse and support.

Understand this clearly. Morality is a vital glue of society, for it is concerned with the judgment of what is "good" and "bad" in human character and action. The true moral good consists of those things that are essential to the health, well-being and security of the entire group.

Today, intense conflicts of opinions and religious dogmas are being exploited to drive people apart. The fact of the matter, however, is that boldly broad-minded cooperative efforts are needed to build a more just society and give higher priority to the greater good. This represents the ultimate moral good. Machiavelli was right when he wrote that "Politics have no relation to morals." But that should not be the case. Redesign!

"O ye that love mankind! Ye that dare oppose, not only the tyranny, but the tyrant, stand forth!"
--- Thomas Paine, urging Americans to action to end British tyranny

We should give more sway not only to considerations of the quality of life for people alive today, but also for the quality of life that our actions today imply for our descendants. Unfortunately, a better quality of life for the vast majority of Americans is being sacrificed to the conceits and entitled attitudes of the 2% of Americans who have annual incomes in excess of $250,000. The security of most Americans is being sacrificed to the zeal of most millionaires and billionaires to be allowed to pay low taxes on top levels of their incomes.

Fervent embraces of economic ideologies that promote the maximizing of profits are contrary to a true pro-life position when they involve narrow and unethical gambits that allow the costs of health-harming air pollution, water pollution and toxic wastes to be foisted onto society. On a more far-reaching scale that seriously affects future generations, it is contrary to an honest pro-life position to allow the wasteful depletion of life-enabling resources and widespread damages to natural ecosystems, along with uncontrolled emissions of heat-trapping greenhouse gases into the atmosphere that disrupt normal weather patterns and contribute to more destructive storms, floods, droughts and wildfires.

Almost every form of life on Earth is threatened by our failure to support initiatives that would help protect the environment, prevent pollution, and deal sensibly with climate disruptions. An arrogant lack of respect for all non-human forms of life on Earth is not a pro-life approach to policy-making. Those who push to overturn the Endangered Species Act are not acting in a true pro-life way, and neither are those who want to encourage the aggressively destructive exploitation of public lands.

"He who takes nature for his guide, is not easily beaten out of his argument."
--- Thomas Paine

Choosing to stubbornly oppose freely available contraceptives, including emergency "morning-after pills", at the expense of women's prerogatives to prevent pregnancy, is to be rudely unempathetic, draconianly discriminatory, paternalistic, and heedlessly unconcerned with the real quality of life. With almost 8 billion people on Earth, church dogmas that say we must be fruitful and multiply no longer add up. Opposition to family planning choices is simply not a valid life-affirming attitude.

There are more than 40 million abortions in the world every year. If zealots who say they are "pro-life" really want to reduce this number, it could easily be done by promoting the use of contraceptives and the morning-after pill and other birth control methods, and by making family planning options freely available to women and men worldwide. "Pro-life" people, come to your senses! Not only would such initiatives prevent millions of abortions every year, they could prevent countless cases of sexually-transmitted diseases, thereby eliminating an untold amount of unnecessary suffering.

Anyone opposed to abortion should be strongly supportive of easy access or free availability to birth control. Up to two-thirds of all abortions in the United States could be prevented by such a policy. Researchers at the

Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis offered free birth control to more than 9,000 mostly low-income women and teenagers, and found out that the number of unplanned pregnancies in the group fell between 60% and 80% below the national average. Receiving free birth control made teens just one-sixth as likely to get pregnant. Since this group is particularly susceptible to becoming pregnant, no-cost birth control would be a key plan for reducing unintended pregnancies and abortions -- and unwanted children.

The United Nations explicitly described family planning as a "universal human right" for the first time in 2012. With this declaration, the United Nations effectively made the case that legal, cultural and financial barriers to accessing contraception and other family planning measures are an infringement of women's rights. The time has come today for governments, and the Catholic Church and other religious establishments, to acknowledge this right to women everywhere.

"Conservatives" tend to champion expansive rights of personhood for a fertilized egg, no matter how conception occurs, at the expense of a woman's liberties and right to exert control over her health, bodily autonomy and future. Such attitudes are conspicuously contrary to respect for women's lives. It is preposterous to posit that life begins at conception and then ignore the needs of mothers and children once a baby is born.

Another important consideration is that open-minded and generous "good neighbor" attitudes that serve to reinforce the Golden Rule ethic of reciprocity and mutual security for peoples in all countries are much truer pro-life stances than ethnocentric supremacism or domineering attitudes that rationalize military aggression. True pro-life stances would regard preemptive warfare and repressive military occupations of other nations as supremely unethical, and they would prevent "military Keynesian" policies that facilitate unethical profit maximizing by war services corporations and others involved in the military-industrial complex.

A First Step Required to Fix Our Democracy

The Supreme Court ruled by a 5-to-4 vote in June 2013 that some key provisions of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 were unconstitutional. Right-wing Justice Antonin Scalia had sent shock waves through the collective conscience by declaring earlier that Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act represents a "perpetuation of racial entitlement." This provision contains requirements for how states that have a history of making efforts to deprive minorities of voting rights can legally change their voting laws. It was a provision designed to prevent unfair changes to voting prerequisites or qualifications when the purpose of the changes was to discriminate against people on account of their race. Scalia's words made his attitude about voting rights starkly clear. He seems to see merit in racially discriminatory Jim Crow laws of yesteryear. Astonishingly, "conservatives" on the Supreme Court actually narrowly agreed with Scalia, and struck down parts of this eminently fair law.

As a perverse outcome of this ruling, many Republican-controlled states have enacted numerous restrictive voting laws. And long lines have been encountered in some voting places since then, as in Arizona primaries in March 2016, where there were 70 percent fewer polling places than in 2012 in Maricopa County (where Phoenix is located). All those polling places would not have been allowed to be eliminated if the Supreme Court had not eviscerated the Voting Rights Act. Many more aggressively restrictive laws have subsequently been proposed and enacted since the 2020 elections, with Republicans in almost every state waging egregious campaigns professing to care about "election integrity" that in fact resemble integrity-deficient "Jim Crow 2.0".

Sensationally, Antonin Scalia declared: "Whenever a society adopts racial entitlements, it is very difficult *to get out of them* through the normal political processes." In one sense, Antonin Scalia was sure right about "racial entitlements". Once black people were finally given the right to vote, as with women, it's definitely hard to take that right away! Not only has the political right been making concerted efforts to make it harder for people to vote by using tactics like reducing voting hours, but they have also used "caging lists" to purge voter registration rosters and deny many people their voting rights. Conservatives have passed many restrictive new voting laws in Republican-controlled states, as well as having seriously gerrymandered congressional districts into bizarre contortions, particularly in the South. Their main purpose in these efforts is to give more undue influence to conservatives. Before the 2018 elections, this contributed to making the House of Representatives the least representative of moderate interests in modern history. Conservatives are also busy taking advantage of the Electoral College system to benefit rich people, corporations and right-wing elements of society so that

they have a better chance of continuing to dominate our national decision-making. despite having lost the national popular vote for president by a whopping 7 million votes in 2020. Donald Trump managed to narrowly win the 2016 election in the Electoral College, despite having lost the national popular vote by almost 3 million votes, and this proved to be highly negative for our country and the world. Then he lost the popular vote in 2020 by some 7 million votes, and desperately began promoting big lies about election fraud and incited an insurrectionary riot on January 6, 2021 against the certification of the 2020 presidential election, posing a grave threat to our democracy.

Sometimes the simplest solution to a problem is the best. To really make our nation a truer democracy, we should rightly make a constitutional amendment stipulating that the President and members of Congress be chosen by direct popular vote: Whoever gets the most votes wins! This is one of the fairest ways to reform our elections -- let every citizen vote, and get rid of the antiquated Electoral College system altogether. At the same time, actions should be taken to reduce the corrupting influence of Big Money in our national politics and state legislatures.

It is difficult to take away any right, perk, privilege, subsidy or loophole from any person or business, even if it has been gained by unethical means rather than fair, fiscally responsible, or ethical means. A concrete instance of this fact is that, once high-income earners were given the privilege of paying historically low tax rates on the highest levels of their incomes, it has been practically impossible to claw back even a small amount of that generosity. This is true despite the fact that such policies are saddling everyone in every future year with an unconscionably heavy burden of debt and interest expense obligations.

Ambrose Bierce, the journalist and satirist who was one of Mark Twain's prominent contemporaries, cynically defined a Conservative as a person who is enamored with existing injustices, "as distinguished from the Liberal, who wishes to replace them with others." Ha! Surely we would be best served by seeing justice and injustices in the clearest possible light, and by using a balanced approach to redress all kinds of inequities.

Lee Atwater and Machiavellian Opportunists

It is striking to realize that the Republican Party has long indulged in a "Southern Strategy" of trying to get political support and win elections by crudely appealing to racism and bigotry against African Americans. This white supremacist strategy has been "successful" in many regards, particularly in the South where it has been a big contributing factor to a long-lasting electoral realignment of Southern states so that they generally elect conservative Republican representatives instead of more progressive Democrats. Curiously, most people in Southern States would actually be much better served by policies that are more progressive and inclusive, rather than ones that are retrogressive, divisive and contrary to the common good.

Why did this realignment take place? Remember, a majority of Southerners had voted for Democrats for 100 years after the Civil War, in reaction to Republican President Abraham Lincoln having freed slaves during the war. It was only after Democrats supported desegregation, and civil rights for Blacks, and the overturning of discriminatory Jim Crow laws in the 1960s that the South shifted to supporting Republicans again.

Lee Atwater, known as the "boogeyman" of Republican politics, was the first modern political operative to make extensive use of racism, dirty tricks, scandals and fear to gain power. Atwater adopted win-no-matter-what-the-cost strategies. He was a "slime slinger" who tried to fool Black people into thinking the Republican Party really cared about their interests. At age 40, Atwater developed a brain tumor and made deathbed confessions of what he realized were the wrongness of his actions. Karl Rove, in turn, chose to emulate these Machiavellian tactics to help give George W. Bush power, and then Steve Bannon goaded racial divisions to help Trump win.

The cost of this Southern Strategy has been increasing as minority populations grow, and as poverty increases, and as the Republican Party continues to largely ignore the interests of Blacks, Latinos, women, poor people and the middle class. In the 2012 and 2016 elections, this strategy contributed to a Republican rebuke in which more than 90% of black voters and 70% of Latino voters gave Democratic presidential candidates their votes. Republicans seemed to be beginning to realize they should seek sincere ways to truly appeal to minority voters, and women and young people, though their heart sure has not been in the endeavor. Truly comprehensive

immigration reform, for instance, should have been undertaken and accomplished. "Evolve, guys!" Instead, they continue to make reprehensible leaps backwards with cynically devious, cruel and counterproductive policies.

After the rebuke Republicans received in the 2012 elections, some of their most prominent spokespersons acknowledged that their party desperately needed to improve its image. But Republican proposals for a make-over generally involve changing their sales pitch and manipulative messaging, rather than more honestly and responsibly being more fair-minded, or trying to substantially change the policies they push. When it comes to substance, Republicans should alter their obstinate commitment to policies and priorities that enrich the few to the detriment of the many.

An imperative is clear: fairer campaign finance laws and gerrymandering reforms are needed to prevent further distortions of our politics by narrowly focused interests. "One person, one vote" should again become the law of the land, and not the current corrupt system that is more like a "one dollar, one vote" system.

Voting Rights in Our Great Nation

Thomas Paine wrote passionately about fair representation of the people, envisioning a "one person, one vote" system as the best plan, and our nation's Founders had established it in 1789, in a narrow form. For the next 200 years, voting rights have been expanded to include other segments of the populace, like black men, and then women, and then 18 to 21-year-old young adults. The American people should be proud and thankful about this marvelous progressive expansion of fair representation in our nation.

But in recent years, our political system has been so corrupted by moneyed interests that it now resembles a much less fair "one dollar, one vote" system. Our representatives, as a result, have demonstrated an incapability of instituting markedly fairer national policies -- or restoring Clinton-era tax rates on the wealthy. This proves that the richest 2% of all Americans wrongly has more influence in our politics than the other 98% combined.

Hey, what's that sound? -- Look what's going down … It may be our country's Founders turning over in their graves, in light of despotic Trump Republican abuses of power.

The Founding of our country makes a sensational story. A small group of aroused colonial leaders had gotten so angry at British oppressors by 1776 that they courageously risked everything by declaring independence, and they valiantly championed the visionary principles of the Enlightenment Era, headily asserting that "all men are created equal". Then, 12 years later, they created a brilliant Constitution to ensure a more perfect Union. Having committed the nation to these ideas in principle, they were not quite able to match their rule-making to their ideals. They granted the right to vote in the first national elections in 1788 only to white men who owned property -- about 6% of citizens. By 1830, individual states had expanded voting rights to include most adult white males. Expanding public education and increasing literacy allowed more people to assume democratic responsibilities, and our democracy was becoming more fairly representative.

Black males were given the right to vote after slaves were freed during the Civil War, with the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution in 1870. Women were finally given a more official voice in our society when they won the right to vote after a decades-long hard-fought battle for women's suffrage, with the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920. Native Americans were given the right to vote in 1924. American citizens living in Washington D.C. were given the right to vote when the 23rd Amendment was ratified in 1961 (though they still have not been given representation in Congress.) Poll taxes that had been used to restrict voting rights were outlawed in 1964. Literacy tests and racist voting practices were prohibited by the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Young adults between 18 and 21 were granted the right to vote in 1971, so that all those who risked their lives serving their country in the military would have a voice in national decision-making.

Unfortunately, conservative politicians in recent years have been fighting vigorously to reverse this fair-minded trend. They have been working to restrict voting rights, especially those of Blacks, Latinos, students, disabled people and poor people. These anti-democratic initiatives have been implemented in many states controlled by Republican legislatures and governors. Such unethical, reprehensible tactics should be resoundingly rejected!

Republicans rationalize voter suppression efforts and recent opposition to vote-by-mail measures as a means to supposedly prevent voter fraud. But statistics show that instances of voter fraud are extremely rare. In stark contrast, Republicans have been trying to disenfranchise MILLIONS OF AMERICAN CITIZENS with their vote-restricting initiatives in dozens of states, especially in Georgia, Florida, Texas and Arizona.

I recommend that every registered voter be given a vote-by-mail ballot for all national and state elections, and that everyone be incentivized to vote. Just think of the amount of fossil fuels that would be saved by making it unnecessary for so many people to go to polling places and stand in long lines in some places to vote!

Tom Perkins' Shrewd but Idiotically Unjust Voting Scheme

Tom Perkins was a billionaire who was one of the original "venture capitalists", known for having co-founded the firm that became Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers. Perkins, who subsequently died in June 2016, spoke with the *Fortune* magazine journalist Adam Lashinsky at the Commonwealth Club in San Francisco in February 2014 in a program titled "The War on the 1%." Discussion focused on the issue of income inequality, and Perkins, 82 years old at the time, revealed his extreme opinions on social, fiscal and monetary policy, and also expressed his self-aggrandizing opinion that taxes are being used as a weapon against the wealthiest 1%.

At the end of the Commonwealth Club event, Perkins was challenged to say, in 60 seconds, how he would change the world for the better. He made "a playfully controversial response", and expressed admiration for the belief of Thomas Jefferson that only landowners should get the right to vote, and for Margaret Thatcher's conviction that only people who pay taxes should be allowed to vote. So this was his proposal: "The Tom Perkins system is: You don't get the vote if you don't pay a dollar in taxes. But what I really think is, it should be like a corporation. You pay a million dollars, you get a million votes. How's that?"

Billionaires, of course, already wield diabolically excessive influence through their tentacled intrigues and the giant megaphones of their enormous wealth, without any need to illegally stuff ballot boxes.

The audience laughed cynically, and right there the ghastly ghost of the *Citizen's United* ruling by the Supreme Court floated in the air, and the corruption of our national decision-making by rich people and giant corporations became clearer. "Perkins later said offstage that what he meant was that, with 50% of registered U.S. voters not paying taxes, 'we got ourselves into a mess.'" So, he suggested that the bottom 50% be deprived of the right to vote! The mess we have gotten into, it seems, is demonstrably due to the corrupt political duopoly system that already gives *too much* influence to rich people, not *too little*. Our beleaguered system also gives excessive influence to corporations, which are by nature amoral, being concerned mainly about short-term profits, NOT about the general welfare of the people, the greater good of humanity or the habitability of the planet. Corporations, of course, are legal entities that operate as tools for the distribution of corporate profits to the people who own equities -- and voila! -- proof positive: the top 1% owns over half of all stocks, bonds and mutual funds in the U.S.

Perkins also voiced an opinion that "The extreme progressivity of taxation is a form of persecution." He even indicated that he feared taxes would go higher and higher until there is no 1%. "It's an economic extinction, not a physical one," he added, circling back to a rash idea he infamously expressed in a letter to the editor of the *Wall Street Journal* in January 2014, in which he claimed there is severe discrimination against America's rich that is like the terrible treatment of Jews in Nazi Germany. He asserted that the 1% faces a "rising tide of hatred" like that of Kristallnacht, a pogrom in 1938 that led to the eventual massacre of 6 million Jews by the Axis powers during World War II. What a pathological assessment, ghost of Perkins!

Tom Perkins later warily apologized for the hyperbole of this absurd comparison, but he still maintained his stance that rich people are persecuted, particularly in the city of San Francisco, where he saw a "demonization of the rich" in the Occupy movement in 2011 and 2012, and in on-going outrage over city gentrification and exorbitant real estate prices that have been driven up by thousands of people who live in the City and work in jobs in high tech Silicon Valley, 60 miles to the south.

A contrarian refutation of Perkins' bizarre perspective is close at hand. There were 66 billionaires in the U.S. in 1990, and now there are more than 725 in 2022. The richest 1% of Americans is definitely being buried --

under record amounts of wealth. If really rich people don't begin choking on their excess, their hubris in manipulating public policy to give themselves a near monopoly on receiving a grotesquely outsized proportion of the nation's profits could provoke Nemesis, the Goddess of Divine Retribution in Greek mythology, and her distant great-grandson God (in one of his angrily vindictive moods), and together they may wreak vengeance on the wealthy. And if the harsh poetic justice of divine retribution is not soon forthcoming, then it probably won't be long before revolutionary unrest arises that would prove to be much more severe than divine comeuppance. The ghost of wise Solon smiles knowingly, for such turmoil would be bad news for all, <u>especially including the rich</u>.

Let's open our minds. Tom Perkins was acting in arrogantly entitled ways that were stone deaf in his tone deafness. He seemed to harbor feelings of paranoia, persecution and a sense of jealously entitled deservedness of his good fortune. Once again I find greater credulity and probability in objective evidence-based opinions (woke?!) than in passionately aroused, blindly partisan and extremely self-serving beliefs. This is one reason that I enthusiastically encourage readers to give close consideration to the ideas in these soliloquies.

We are obviously missing the mark in the goal of making our nation fairer, overall healthier, and more secure. Since moneyed interests have such unwarranted and unjustifiable influence in our political system, Congress and the administration -- and the Supreme Court -- must all begin to give fairer, more sensible consideration to the interests of the vast majority of Americans, and not merely to the interests of the wealthiest people and the corporate vehicles that enable the concentration of wealth. As Thomas Paine observed in *Common Sense:* "Of more worth is one honest man to society and in the sight of God, than all the crowned ruffians that every lived."

<u>How Can So Many People Misunderstand So Much</u>?

In *What's the Matter with Kansas,* Thomas Frank gave cogent instances of ways the "borderline criminality of capitalism itself" is harming people and our nation. He stated that this is "a condition that has rudely impressed itself on much of the world in the last few years." Since the time he wrote those words in 2004, this situation has gotten much worse. "Spectacular plunder" is involved, and "brutal economic processes". Labor unions in the private sector have been eviscerated, wages have been depressed, minimum wages are frozen, sensible regulations have been evaded, reforms have been prevented, rich people keep getting more big tax breaks, economic recessions resulted from both the deregulation of the banking and financial system and then the global pandemic, and destabilizing bubble economic policies have wreaked havoc on countless millions of people. In addition, the environment continues to be rashly polluted, and natural resources like fossil fuels and fresh water are being squandered at calamitously unsustainable rates.

At the same time, conservatives have been vey dishonest with the American people. They have used the deluded echo chamber of Fox News and the rantings of conservative talk radio hosts and the spin of people in right-wing think tanks, and Trump loyalists in Congress, to fool many Americans into believing distorted versions of reality. This is glaringly apparent in the Big Lie about the outcome of the free and fair 2020 presidential election. Republicans have also been championing deceitful "movement conservatism" and pushing their crude ideologies fervently, so most people have skewed understandings of what the two political parties really represent. Odd interpretations about freedom and the greater good and true social responsibility drift in the biosphere.

Propagandists push popular misunderstandings about government spending and the huge national debt. Republicans repeatedly portrayed President Obama as a big spender of government funds. It comes as a big surprise to most people, therefore, that statistics reveal a completely different story. Barack Obama actually increased federal spending less than any president since Eisenhower, according to a *MarketWatch* analysis.

The fact of the matter is that the biggest *increases* in federal spending since 1980 have taken place during tenures of Republican presidents. The annualized growth in spending during Ronald Reagan's eight-year tenure averaged almost 7%; during George H.W. Bush's tenure it was over 5%; and during George W. Bush's eight years it was almost 8%. In surprising contrast, during Bill Clinton's eight years it was less than 4%; and during the first term of Barack Obama, it was less than 2%.

Likewise, despite propaganda to the contrary, the national debt has consistently increased more during times that Republicans controlled the Executive Branch than it has during periods with a Democrat as president. The reason for this is because of lower revenues that result from Republicans giving huge tax breaks to the people with the highest incomes, in tandem with lavish spending during the administrations of Republican presidents.

Economist Mike Kimel confirmed this fact, pointing out that former Democratic Presidents Bill Clinton, Jimmy Carter, Lyndon Johnson, John F. Kennedy and Harry Truman all reduced public debt as a share of GDP while the last four Republican Presidents -- George W. Bush, George H.W. Bush, Ronald Reagan and Gerald Ford -- all oversaw an increase in this ratio of our national indebtedness. Spending in Donald Trump's four years in office increased by more than 20%.

Surely we are better off living in "an evidence-based world" than in a world where disingenuous leaders "keep repeating things over and over and over again for the truth to sink in, to kind of catapult the propaganda," as George W. Bush bragged about doing. Statistics, of course, can be parsed in different ways to reach different conclusions, but we should all commit to working together to forge a more balanced approach to government spending and taxation, so that we stop undermining good solutions and avoiding making hard choices, and excessively mortgaging the future. One specific focus should be to ensure that the national debt stops growing faster than the rate of economic growth.

If we want a peaceable society, we need to make it a fairer one, not an increasingly unfair one with exaggerated disparities in economic and financial well-being, and health and personal security, between the Haves and the Have Nots. On the domestic front, as in international relations, the best way to harvest peace is to be found in sowing justice. A more sensible balance should be established between the freedoms and prerogatives of privileged individuals and the well-being of the entire community.

Where to Look for Positive New Direction

Years before the virus epidemic, I wrote that there are other "defining challenges of our age" than climate change -- "like the declining fortunes of the middle class and poor people, the irresponsible wastefulness of our system of materialistic consumerism, the rash squandering of resources, the deep dilemmas associated with human population growth, and tragedy-of-the-commons assaults on the environment."

To sensibly deal with these challenges, we need to look to the three types of social institutions that dominate our society: corporations, governments, and churches. All three of these categories of institutions are failing us today in times of increasingly desperate needs. This failure is occurring because all these institutions are vulnerable to a variety of influences that distort their true higher purposes.

Corporations and churches are extremely undemocratic institutions. They are led by small groups of people who wield dominating hierarchal authority. Since corporations are legally bound to narrow purposes of maximizing profits and limiting the liabilities of owners, most of the benefits of corporate activities go to shareholders and the people in top management positions. As a consequence, short shrift is given to employees, communities, the health of the environment, and society as a whole.

In the early years of the automobile industry, Henry Ford, who founded the Ford Motor Company, believed in the value of paying relatively high wages to his workers so that they would be able to afford to buy the high cost products his company was producing. His generosity in paying high wages to employees was ruled illegal as a result of a 1919 court case, *Dodge vs. Ford Motor Company*. The Michigan Supreme Court ruled in this case that a business corporation is organized mainly for the profit of its shareholders. Corporations, they judged, must give primary consideration to the interests (and dividends!) of shareholders. Any other motive, like paying workers generously, or acting ethically and responsibly toward workers and the environment, was ruled to be legally constrained by this obligation.

In recent years, curiously, the astronomical generosity of salaries and benefits for CEOs and people in top management has NOT been subjected to similar limitations. Power obviously undermines justice!

One result of judicial mandates for corporations to maximize profits for shareholders is that corporations are not only driven to improve their operations and products and services, but also to cut corners, circumvent common sense regulations, externalize public health and environmental costs, indulge in unfair competitive practices, exploit non-productive "rent-seeking" advantages, evade taxes, cheat customers, invest in lobbying efforts to gain more subsidies and tax breaks, indulge in many schemes to avoid paying taxes, and support pork barrel spending and war profiteering. These things are undesirable from the perspective of the greater good!

Churches are even less democratic than corporations. The Catholic Church is headed by a Pope who is selected by about 124 cardinals (current number eligible to vote), almost all of whom are conservative old men. The Church's goals are so undemocratic that women are given completely inferior influence in the Church, and the official positions of religious authorities are dictated by inflexible doctrines, unevolved dogma, and male-dominion-oriented patriarchal supremacist policies. As a result, church establishments often collaborate with dominion-demanding political conservatives rather than liberal humanists, in a blatantly unchristian alliance.

Societies ruled by Islamic theocratic hierarchies, like those in Iran and Saudi Arabia, are even more sadly retrogressive and repressive. Pretty please, make reforms! As Albert Einstein astutely declared in 1901: "A foolish faith in authority is the greatest enemy of truth."

A new Pope was being chosen in 2013 as these words were first materializing in the interstices of my mind. The problems facing the troubled and stodgy old Catholic Church are legion, and most Americans regard Catholic bishops as rather out of touch on many issues. The Church should address the widespread evidence-based perception that it is a patriarchal institution riddled with discrimination, self-serving hypocrisy, intrigue, deceit, and obsession with money and power. It should begin to act as a more fair and accountable entity, rather than emulating an arrogant authoritarian monarchy. It should do this by ceasing to defend flawed understandings of evolutionary biological impulses, gender roles and outdated theological notions concerning human sexuality.

After Pope Francis was chosen to lead the church, he gave an Easter Sunday address in March 2013 in which he wisely deplored the "iniquitous exploitation of natural resources." In this regard, it would be wise to heed his advice. He indicated that social justice and protections of the environment would be hallmarks of his papacy, reflecting the ministry of St. Francis of Assisi, the patron saint who the new Pope adopted as his own. That was a good start to his reign! And HALLELUJAH for his climate change encyclical in 2015!

In September 2013, Pope Francis lamented: "The church sometimes has locked itself up in small things, in small-minded rules." He also said in the same interview: "We cannot insist only on issues related to abortion, gay marriage and the use of contraceptive methods." … "We have to find a new balance; otherwise even the moral edifice of the church is likely to fall like a house of cards, losing the freshness and fragrance of the Gospel." Good call, Pope! The fragrance of the Gospel too oft manifests itself more like a putrid stench.

Mark Twain once made the cogent remark, "The church is always trying to get other people to reform; it might not be a bad idea to reform itself a little, by way of example." A favorite joke among people in Rome about the Vatican's reluctance to embrace reform is a quip about the Church's modus operandi: "Talk to me on Tuesday and I'll get back to you in 300 years." Ha!

The seven main areas in need of reform to refocus the Church on greater fairness, farsightedness and more inclusive visions of the moral good are:

(1) To modernize the Church's attitudes toward birth control measures, for many compelling reasons that include minimizing the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases and dealing effectively with problems like unwanted children, overpopulation, environmental degradation, shortages of food and water, and other issues related to the true quality of life;
(2) To deal honestly, effectively, and fairly with priests and their victims in sexual abuse scandals, which have plagued the Church worldwide in recent years with children being molested by priests and such heinous wrongdoing being covered up by religious authorities, even including the two previous Popes.
(3) To change Church rules that deny women the right to be ordained as priests, and allow women to have more important ecclesiastical roles in the Church;

(4) To address a steep decline in the number of priests by overturning the Vatican's odd 1,500-year-old ban on priests being married;
(5) To change the Church's official discriminatory and denunciatory tune against gay people;
(6) To put the Vatican's organizational structure in more open and accountable order, and to thereby deal with financial and governance scandals that have been bedeviling the Church; and,
(7) To emphasize more persistent and farsighted messages to the faithful flock about the importance of social justice, political and social fairness, resource conservation and protections of Earth's environment.

Since religious establishments and corporate entities are so distinctly undemocratic, our main hope for fairer representation in decision-making is to be found with governments. All governments tend to be corrupted by the powerful influence of large corporations and religious establishments, and by the distorting influence of vested interest groups, but progressive elements still have significant sway, and our federal government is still nominally ruled by a fairness-oriented Constitution and Bill of Rights, and precedents of established laws that have evolved over the past two centuries.

We should demand that our representatives in government demonstrate progressive leadership in dealing with the big issues that confront us: environmental protections and peaceful coexistence on the global scene, and guaranteed personal liberties, improved public education, fairness in the strife between rich people and all others, expanded rights to self-determination for women, and eminently reasonable compromises in all conflicts between capital and labor. Progressive evangelicals, please help!

An Audience with the Pope

The Latin root of the word religion is *religio,* meaning *to bond together.* Humanity has an overarching need to bond together in a far-reaching and conscientious devotion to a more responsible stewardship of creation. This need is growing steadily, along with increasing human numbers and intensifying demands on resources and ecosystem services and the "carbon sink capacity" of the biosphere. All religions should strive for a common bond of peaceful coexistence by coming together to give higher priority to helping satisfy this transcendent obligation. We should become downright evangelical or practically puritanical in this duty, in the sense of seeking to judiciously inspire this ultimate righteous moral code for our kind as a whole in the long term.

Pope Francis shocked religious conservatives early in his tenure when he was asked about homosexuals and responded, "Who am I to judge?" I'm glad you asked, Pope Francis! You are the powerful leader of an ossified behemoth institution that has enormous influence on people's conceptions of right and wrong, and you are dealing with a giant hairball of institutional inertia in the Catholic Church hierarchy. This stodgy stasis is sadly preventing the faithful from evolving a more positive and inclusive morality. How ironic that *catholic* means "all-embracing"! Your Church, Pope, is clinging to archaic dogmatic canons too often, and dishonorably claiming they are absolute truths that reflect God's will. The Church is also continuing to deny the biggest picture understandings ever conceived about the evolution of life on Earth. It should rightly become a stronger force for fairer dealings and inclusiveness, mitigating conflicts between people, especially ones that result in violence.

It is good to see you shaking up conservatives a little, Pope Francis, by shifting your emphasis away from "small-minded rules", but that is not enough. Stop pretending that Church teachings on big issues like contraception, abortion, homosexuality and the impossibility of ordaining women as priests are matters of God's will, rather than Church doctrine defined and imposed by extremely inequitable power-abusing male religious authorities.

Attention to the Here and Now

The shock-engendering news that Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia died suddenly on February 13, 2016 really shook up presidential primary campaigns, for a decision then had to be made about his replacement. The news reminded me of a surprising story about Justice Scalia that had surfaced after an interview with him appeared in New York Magazine. Scalia said he believed in heaven, hell and the devil. The devil? "Yeah, he's a real person. Hey, c'mon, that's standard Catholic doctrine! Every Catholic believes that."

Frankly, not every Catholic believes that. In fact, even Pope John Paul II once said that heaven is not a real place up in the sky, and he also indicated that hell is not a physical place either. Antonin Scalia, however, was a

Biblical literalist who believed otherwise, and he seemed to have been willing to consign whole groups of people to worser fates here on Earth if they did not conform to his judgmental beliefs and personal prejudices and ideological certitudes. This makes a shrewd observation by the pragmatic philosopher William James ring with persuasive truth: "A great number of people think that they are thinking, when they are merely rearranging their prejudices."

It is disturbing to find out that top federal judicial officials have made important decisions affecting millions of people's lives in conformity with dogmatic religious beliefs. It is the prerogative of Scalia to have believed in literal interpretations of the Bible, since everyone in our democracy has the freedom to believe whatever they like. But when he allowed his judicial opinions to be informed by strictly constricted personal religious beliefs, like those related to women's rights, minority rights and gay rights, an overarching injustice resulted. "It is both frightening and disconcerting that a Supreme Court Justice, sworn to uphold the U.S. Constitution, has so blatantly ignored the fact that our constitution is secular and not religious," said one observer.

Aye, there's the rub! A grave form of potential evil is associated with belief systems that proclaim an absolute certainty that there is an afterlife where believers, by dutifully believing, will be rewarded with eternal existence in a "Heaven" place of rapturous and sublime beauty and ease -- but non-believers, by not believing, will deserve to be condemned to eternity in a "Hell" place of fiery and tortuous suffering and anguish. It is evil because condemning others to a hellish afterlife is strongly correlated to a radically more reprehensible attitude of condemning them to discriminatory injustices in the here and now.

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

A literal belief that a Devil exists to bedevil "sinners" and non-believers can be a convenient receptacle for harshly judgmental prejudices, and such a belief can become evil incarnate by motivating fundamentalist believers to demonize others or subject them to severe criticism, ostracism, discrimination, domestic violence, hate, or even Inquisitions, torture, murder or genocide -- or terrorist attacks and suicide bombings.

In one of the world's most famous myths, Faust made a deal with the Devil in which he would gain all knowledge of the physical world, and power over it, but he had to pay the Devil with his soul for this privilege. In the original myth, Faust goes to Hell at the end, but in a later version, the playwright Goethe granted him redemption. George Lucas explored a similar theme to Goethe's in his Star Wars trilogy, and it looms large in our imaginations. Will technology save us, or destroy us? "Our computers, our tools, our machines are not enough," says Bill Moyers. "We have to rely on our intuition, our true being."

Literal interpretations of Holy Book stories can eventually prove to be the kiss of death to the purpose, meaning and emotional power of the generative myths they contain. Contemplate, for instance, the personal experience of Reza Aslan, the author of *Zealot, The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth:* "The bedrock of evangelical Christianity, at least as it was taught to me, is the unconditional belief that every word of the Bible is God-breathed and true, literal and inerrant. The sudden realization that this belief is patently and irrefutably false, that the Bible is replete with the most blatant and obvious errors and contradictions -- just as one would expect from a document written by hundreds of hands across thousands of years -- left me confused and spiritually unmoored. And so, like many people in my situation, I angrily discarded my faith as if it were a costly forgery I had been duped into buying."

There is a good answer to the late Rodney King's conciliatory question, "Can't we all just get along?" YES, WE CAN! We could get along *a lot better* by honoring the virtuous ethic of reciprocity epitomized by the Golden Rule. This would be a much better guiding light for humanity than narrowly parochial dogmas, especially in light of the fact that the world is becoming increasingly crowded and interconnected -- and the need is growing to find good ways to prevent conflicts, and to resolve ones that arise.

> "When white missionaries came to Africa, they had the Bible and we had the land. They said 'Let us pray.' We closed our eyes. When we opened them, we had the Bible, and they had the land."
>
> --- Desmond Tutu

A Goal of Overriding Importance

Recall that Dick Cheney infamously declared in 2002, "Reagan proved deficits don't matter." This is one of the most ridiculous statements ever uttered. Cheney made this claim as a convenient rationalization for borrowing huge sums of money to finance trillion-dollar tax cuts and big increases in military spending. We should not forget Cheney's blatant conflicts of interest in this doctrine, because it contributed significantly to the profitability of the oilfield services company Halliburton and its subsidiaries -- those same corporate entities that Cheney had led as CEO just prior to his selecting himself to be Vice President under George W. Bush.

Abraham Lincoln lent a sensational perspective to such abuses of power when he stated: "Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power."

If there are apparent good grounds for suspecting a man's character, like his manifesting rigidly retrogressive conservatism, let's choose NOT to give him power! It is exceedingly unfair and socially irresponsible to finance wasteful priorities by borrowing money from every future taxpayer. "No need to pay as we go" chimed the Republican chorus when George W. Bush was president, as they repeatedly rubber-stamped increases in the U.S. debt ceiling to accommodate the mounting tsunami of deficit spending. They even created a new entitlement program for prescription drugs that has been financed by well over $1 trillion in borrowed money since 2003, and they allowed gigantic drug companies to write the specific provisions of this sorry legislation so that profits on drug sales would be maximized -- at public expense. This necessarily meant, of course, that the deficit-financed cost of the program would be *a whole lot higher to taxpayers than it should be.*

Hey, cost cutters, this should be easy! Let's defy the profit-maximizing Big Pharmaceutical lobby for a change, and demand that every one of our political representatives unanimously supports negotiating volume discounts and new provisions to require less expensive generic drugs for Medicare recipients, where available.

Admiral Mike Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff from 2007 to 2011, made a much more likely honest statement in 2010 than Dick Cheney's when he said: "Our national debt is our biggest national security threat." Yikes! It is a stunning possibility that the failure to adequately control deficit spending may be a bigger threat to us than all those terrorists we've misguidedly been spending trillions of dollars to defeat and antagonize and drop bombs on, from drones above. It is foolish to fight endless hyper-costly wars over the threat of terrorism when the cost itself contributes to bigger risks of future widespread hardships.

Admiral Mullen was basically saying it would be a better investment in a safer future to work together in more effective ways to prevent excessive indulgences in the shortsighted expediency of deficit financing every year, for questionable purposes, year after year after year. Then, when an emergency arrives, like the health and economic pandemic cataclysm that added $3 trillion in one fell swoop, would have been less fiscally risk-laden.

Instead of insensibly requiring across-the-board "sequestration cuts", as Congress did in early 2013, we would have been better off to target spending cuts more specifically and intelligently. We should elect much better managers, and tell the ones we've got to cut government spending by reducing wantonly wasteful levels of poorly controlled spending, especially on the military. Let's bring home a good number of the over 170,000 active-duty personnel stationed in Germany, Japan and nearly 150 other nations abroad. And let us collectively resolve not to make military invasions and occupations of other countries. This would help us achieve the salutary goal of reducing bloated military spending. With respect to foreign relations, let's commit more funds -- like an amount equal to 5% of the military budget -- to helping other peoples make their societies healthier and safer. And, in general, let's act as a better neighbor on the world stage. Policies that create mutual security are the key!

The Institute for Policy Studies once produced a report that outlined significant ways to save about $200 billion per year by controlling Pentagon spending in sensible ways. That's big money! For details, see their online report titled *We're Not Broke: A Commonsense Guide to Avoiding the Fiscal Swindle while Making the United States more Equitable, Green, and Secure.*

Another Shout Out to Proper Accounting

Federal and state governments often use odd accounting gimmicks to avoid making difficult decisions and smart trade-offs. The most significant of such accounting gimmicks is the expediency of borrowing huge sums of money to avoid making more socially responsible budgetary choices. Such shortsighted schemes allow costs to be externalized onto others. Governments often allow businesses to use accounting gimmicks and abuse the power of their unwarranted influence to maximize their own selfish benefits. It would be more sensible to use the concept of "full cost accounting" to create societies that are more socially, fiscally and environmentally responsible. It would be wiser to make our tax policies more progressively structured, and to act courageously to curtail the unfair influences that corrupt our political system. These steps would help ensure the common good and leave a fairer legacy of eco-sanity to people in future years.

Here's a surprising thing: a fair measure of salvation may be found in proper accounting! Such proactive planning makes more sense than to passively believe in a judgmental and punitive God who will supposedly give us salvation only if we cling blindly to a belief in 'His' existence, as revealed by some "holy scripture"!

I invite readers to imagine this modern version of *Common Sense* as encompassing a balanced blend of reason, logic and evidence-based probability, on the one hand, and foresight, passionate caring and spiritual wisdom, on the other. Let salvation and healing -- physical, moral and spiritual -- be the underlying motive for this visionary new version of *Common Sense.* Let us see that economic well-being cannot be achieved in the long run without championing conservation initiatives and adequate protections of the environmental commons.

Shall We Heed the WARNING Signs?

Some say that the U.S. and the world are destined to suffer a harsh economic depression in the next decade because of rash increases in government debt that have been incurred so far this century. These people make convincing arguments, especially after the desperate borrowings required due to the calamitous pandemic. After all, the U.S. national debt more than quadrupled in the two decades from 2001 through 2021, increasing from less than $6 trillion to $30 trillion. To have allowed such a risky increase in debt is rashly irresponsible.

Total interest expense on this debt will carve out an increasing percentage of all federal budgets in future years. This cost exceeded $400 billion almost every year since 2005, and will cause more intense conflicts in the future over budgetary priorities, and between our national needs and the demands of special interest groups. And since the average age of Americans continues a trend of long-term demographic increase, the costs of our social safety net will inexorably climb, and we would be in much better financial condition if we were not already overly burdened with enormous debt.

Baby boomers are reaching retirement age in large numbers, so costs of total benefits for seniors is growing rapidly, and these entitlement costs are causing a budget squeeze on nearly every other category of spending. "The foot is on the accelerator with entitlement programs, and it's on the brakes on investments," said Jim Kessler, vice-president of Third Way, a centrist Democratic think tank, several years ago. "And this country needs more investments." Public investments are being limited in vital things like education, infrastructure, research and development, and other areas that tend to nurture future prosperity. To advance progressive priorities like environmental protections, improved public education, and clean energy research and policy implementation, we need to put sensible cost controls and fair-minded entitlement reforms into effect.

Interest expense on the national debt is a stealth tax on all taxpayers in future years. As the size of this real tax increases with increases in the national debt -- especially with the current rapid increases in interest rates in 2022 from their historic lows -- this cost will constrict future options for lower tax rates or enough spending to make our country fairer, more secure and more stable. We definitely could make a much better plan than the current status quo or devious and irresponsible Trump Republican backwards impulses, if we really wanted to ensure a more salubrious collective fate! I say, "We do; and let's just do it!"

Debt Can Be a Form of Bondage, and Hard Rock Music Is Blaring in the Background at the Moment

Debt can become a deep personal scourge in a borrower's life. The specific condition of "debt bondage" afflicts millions of people. Unscrupulous lenders use repayment requirements as a means of basically enslaving people

and making them fulfill a role similar to that of serfs in feudal times, or of indentured servants in Colonial America, or of inmates in debtor's prisons of old.

Because the ruling political class in the U.S. has collectively failed to limit deficit spending, and all taxpayers in every future year are being saddled with enormous burdens of debt and interest expense obligations, we are unfairly imposing a form of "intergenerational bondage" that will severely constrain options of people in the future to address economic, public health, social and environmental problems.

Today, student loan debt in the U.S. has reached a crushing total of more than $1.7 trillion. This amount is in excess of the total debt on credit cards or auto loans. A threat of massive student loan defaults exists, and is creating "a systemic risk as serious as the bank failures that brought the U.S. economy to the brink of collapse in 2008," according to Project Uncensored. We should seek fair ways to reduce such risks, and make education much more affordable.

The interest rate on federal student loans for undergraduate college students was increased from 3.76% to 4.45% in July 2017, and to 4.99% for 2022-2023. High rates on student loan debt are outrageous, considering that huge corporate banks have been getting money from the Federal Reserve at very low rates of less than 1% for many years. We should be investing in young people, not in maximizing profits made by private banks. Students shouldn't be treated as tough-luck pawns in a game of private profit-making that makes young people too small to matter.

Before the pandemic, I observed, "A harsh economic depression caused by a debt crisis would have catastrophic impacts on billions of people around the world. All Americans should give consideration to this possibility, and be willing to modify their habits a little, and shift their beliefs, and share in a small sacrifice of some of their short-term-oriented self-interested goals to prevent this eventuality. This would represent the greater good for all. European countries, mired in similar fiscal problems, should find better ways to manage their debts, and to balance austerity measures with more fair-minded concessions by people who are well off and can easily contribute to greater general well-being."

All peoples should rise up and demand that leaders worldwide enact national policies that are more fiscally sound and socially fair. This would be one of the best ways to mitigate the growing intensity of conflicts in the world. The wise Athenian statesman Solon, one of my heroes, would have agreed. Such changes might even prove to be one of the best ways to create more peaceable and stronger democratic societies.

Daunting problems face us all, collectively, so <u>together</u> we need to decide how to best manage our local and national affairs. The word "collaboration" reverberates from a tree smoldering on steep slopes of a mountain resembling Nepal's beautiful Ama Dablam, and the sounds of a rousing symphony echo among the mountain peaks. And resounding echoes of Henry Kissinger's ineffable words are heard: "The absence of alternatives clears the mind marvelously."

Effective incentives should be instituted that would encourage all peoples of the world to modify their habits a little bit, and shift their beliefs, and share in a small sacrifice in order to achieve an eventuality that has rosier implications than current ominous trends portend. Robert Reich provocatively pointed out in *Supercapitalism* that consumers and investors have goals that conflict, <u>even within themselves</u>, with goals more consistent with the common good. Investors should therefore be amenable to new requirements for a small percentage to be added to all transactions to fund social insurance policies to finance efforts to help achieve good citizen goals.

The wealthiest 2% of people in the world own more than 50% of the world's wealth, and they tend to prefer shortsighted "austerity recessions" to alternatives that require them to invest a bit more of their incomes in social insurance that serves to help people and mitigate social unrest. Rich folks should be eager to buy relatively inexpensive social insurance by supporting initiatives that create an affordable social safety net. This is common sense. The most salient of these initiatives would be a proposed new system of taxation that is more steeply graduated, assessing higher levels of tax on the highest levels of earnings. Many rich people stubbornly insist that the federal government should maintain the current low tax rates, but this stance substantially increases potentials for a costly economic downturn and risks of more intense civil conflicts.

Recollecting the old song by the Tubes, *What Do You Want from Life*, I figured that the best idea for us might be to formulate a foolproof plan -- and not just to expend greater efforts to cook up "an airtight alibi".

Evaluating Values

Two competing visions are battling for ascendancy in our country. One side says we need to cut taxes on the highest income earners and on corporations. Such policies serve to promote the further enrichment of the rich and impoverishment of the poor. People who promote such policies insist that austerity measures should be imposed on the majority of the American people. A proper understanding of Keynesian economics, however, tells us that the time for government austerity measures is when the economy is expanding, not when it is being buffeted by recessionary forces. Republicans generally push for cutting taxes on the rich and enacting on-your-own sink-or-swim economic plans. They get away with this by deviously calling for "trickle-down" economic plans.

The other side says that the greater economic well-being of our nation can be achieved only by taking steps to ensure that prosperity is shared more broadly, so that millions of American workers are a bit more financially secure and have more money to spend. It is these workers, after all, whose increases in productivity in the past four decades have helped generate large increases in wealth. These are the working people who have seen little sharing of the fruits of their improved labor productivity since Ronald Reagan.

Former President Obama and President Biden more-or-less represent this more progressive side. They give sensible recognition to the idea that we would be better off to strike a fairer balance between the privileges of well-heeled individuals and the well-being of our communities, and between the power of narrowly-focused special interest groups and the power of the people. The domination of our national decision-making by entrenched factions is the most serious factor distorting our national priorities.

The majority of people in the world are going to need to be less desperately insecure for us to have more stable and sustainable societies. Extreme degrees of inequality cause widespread hardships, so they are dangerous. We need to make big changes in economic structures, and that is going to cost a lot, and everyone is going to be responsible for contributing to higher costs. A fairer distribution of wealth in the world is needed to help all people pay the coming higher costs of smart "green taxes" and cost-internalizing assessments.

Incentives, it is well known, are the fairest and most effective means to achieve socially desirable ends. Smart incentives and disincentives are the best way to influence people's behaviors because they are not only quite effective, but also because they are most consistent with various freedoms of choice.

Again, we see that the history of our great nation has been one of a progressive unfolding of increasing fairness that has unsteadily moved us closer to actualizing Enlightenment Era ideals embraced by our Founders. Whenever an existential threat has been on the verge of destroying our great experiment in representative democracy, we have chosen remedial reforms. The best example of this was when wealthy people were forced to agree to a fairer social compact after the Depression of the 1930s began. Salubrious reforms ushered in 40 years of more fairly shared prosperity through a variety of New Deal initiatives that helped poor people and those in the middle class. But then came the Reagan Revolution, and rich people once again grabbed the upper hand. Since then, they have been abusing the power of their undue influence to get an ever-bigger proportion of the benefits of our economic system for themselves. In the process, the fortunes of poor people and the middle class have been dramatically diminished.

> "These capitalists generally act harmoniously and in concert to fleece the people, and now that they have got into a quarrel with themselves, we are called upon to appropriate the people's money to settle the quarrel."
>
> --- Abraham Lincoln's "First Reported Speech", January 1837

American voters made an important choice in reelecting President Obama in the 2012 elections, and in electing progressive Elizabeth Warren as Senator from Massachusetts -- and in rejecting extreme conservatives like Todd Akin, Richard Mourdoch and Allen West. At the time I was hopeful that this outcome would help us collaborate together better on national policies and priorities to make sure they are more consonant with the marvelously broad-minded principles of our Founders, as stated in the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution -- to "establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare,

and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity." But hyper-divisive partisan politicians gained Trumpian sway from 2017 through 2021, and the need is growing to throw "conservatives" out of office because of their efforts to subvert elections and mercilessly exploit narrow advantages for selfish purposes.

On the Desirability of an Effective Opposition Political Party

A strong opposition party should provide a healthy balance in our two-party political system, and it is especially vital to the common good. But the minority party must be a sensible party, not a "stupid party" or a "party of no" that stubbornly obstructs progress and tries to make the President fail, as Republicans did while Barack Obama was in office, and again now that Joe Biden is president. Bobby Jindal, Republican Governor of Louisiana from 2008 until 2016, urged Republicans in the aftermath of the 2012 elections to reject "dumbed-down conservatism" and to "stop being the stupid party". He said Republicans should "stop reducing everything to mindless slogans", and sensibly declared, "We cannot be, we must not be, the party that simply protects the rich so they get to keep their toys." This seemed like good advice, but many in the GOP chose -- and continue to choose -- to ignore it. To protect the rich, and benefit from this scheme is basically their top priority.

If a doctor misunderstands a medical problem and focuses attention on the wrong issues, the prescriptions he or she makes can be harmful. Likewise, when Republicans focus on wrong-headed priorities, their prescriptions can resemble quackery, and they can cause much harm to the populace.

Economist Paul Krugman stated some years ago when the U.S. economy was stagnant and unemployment was high that this was a technical problem that should be solved through better organization, coordination and right action. Krugman believes we should solve such problems in equitable ways to get the economy to resume healthier growth. These ideas, like others in his book *End This Depression Now!,* should be fairly analyzed, and consistent actions should be taken. The global pandemic is teaching us valuable lessons; Let's learn them.

Republicans should reject being the party of unthinking faith and denials of expert understandings. They should stop dogmatically denying the dangers and future costs associated with pandemic diseases, and a warming planet and a changing climate. They should accept progressive reforms of the tax code, and contribute to making sure that comprehensive immigration reforms are enacted. They should allow more scientists and engineers to come to the U.S. on H-1B visas, since such visas are integral to the success of a transformative high-tech economy. And they should stop undermining the rights and dignity of women and gay people, and cease unprecedented obstruction of adaptive laws. Evolve, guys!

Scapegoating in All its Ugliness

A "scapegoat theory of intergroup conflict" provides an explanation for the correlation between times of relative economic despair and increases in prejudice and violence toward "out groups". This theory helps explain the genocidal Holocaust slaughter of 6 million Jews during World War II. Jewish people were scapegoated as convenient to blame for the humiliation Germany had suffered in being defeated in the First World War, and for the subsequent huge reparations that Germans were required to pay. These obligations contributed to a disastrous period of hyperinflation during the 1920s, when the cost of a loaf of bread in Germany went from 1 Deutsche Mark in 1918 to 10 Marks in 1920 to 10,000 Marks at the end of 1922 to one trillion Marks by 1924. Just try to imagine how inflation like that might affect a nation's people!

There is, likewise, much hostility toward gay people, who are often blamed and scapegoated in today's world. This hostility seems to be an unconscious psychological defense mechanism like *displacement* or *projection* that is exhibited by those who fan the flames of prejudice. Pathetically, reactionary groups of people are often well funded and tend to be vehement in their ideologies. They also seem to be deficient in the accuracy of their comprehension and understanding. To create dynamic and healthier and fairer societies, it would be best to eschew Biblical literalism and narrow dogmatism and vituperative Trumpian antagonisms.

I believe in the relative greater virtue and social good of progressive ideas compared to conservative ideas. Follow this line of thought closely. One of the core understandings expressed in these writings is that religious fundamentalism is a big danger because it engenders so much conflict. Exceedingly large costs related to a military war against terrorists make it clear that it would be better for everyone if moderate voices and fairer

policies prevailed in world affairs. The idea of religious freedom was a founding principle of our nation, and Golden Rule ethics naturally imply no one should be able to force their parochial beliefs on others.

Contemplate how different the views are of people who believe in orthodox religious ideas, compared to more enlightened worldviews. Orthodox Christians believe the highest virtue is obedience to ecclesiastical authority. More enlightened folks believe that insightful personal understanding and ethical right action are higher virtues. Orthodox Christians think that "Satan" is the source of all evil, while more enlightened folks believe that ignorance, selfishness and intolerance of others are primary causes of much unnecessary suffering. And, Orthodox Christians believe the Bible is literal and historical, while more enlightened people see this 'Holy Book' as a mythical story that provides guidance through parables and poetic metaphor, as well as commandments.

Orthodox Christians believe that Eve was the first woman on Earth, and that she is the cause of original sin, and that humanity is contaminated by sin. More enlightened believers see Eve as a seeker of knowledge who was the first saint, and that humanity is a spark of the divine. Orthodox believers see blessings and grace as arising from sacraments handed down by religious authorities. Those who are more enlightened see blessings and grace as arising from inner awakening and self-knowledge and generosity of spirit. Orthodox believers tend to see Jesus as the literal Son of God and savior of mankind, while more enlightened perspectives regard Jesus as an archetype and teacher that dwells within each person. Those who cling to orthodox views think salvation can come only through faith, while the more enlightened see salvation as coming from "all-embracing" understanding.

Imagine how distinct a contrast these worldviews are, and how different a society would be that adheres to expansive enlightened views, compared to societies that hew to narrower dogmas.

> "Be in harmony. Live in Peace. If you are out of balance, take inspiration from manifestations of your true inner self. Those who have ears let them hear."
>
> --- The Gospel of Mary Magdalene

<u>An Aside on the Issue of Immigration</u>

One of the most coldly calculating and divisive strategies used by bombastic demagogues like Donald Trump and far right politicians is to gain power by exploiting people's fears and prejudices, and by provoking intolerance and stoking hate. Trump is a media huckster who succeeded by being comically snarky and smirky on camera and smugly insulting on Twitter. While his unreal reality-show antics and snide insults helped propel him to becoming the leader of the most powerful country in the world, the toxic tenor he has interjected into the ranks of the Republican Party is cringe-inducing and dangerous, and he represents risky commitments to nationalistic white supremacy and international trade wars and regressive changes in taxation. His obtuse narcissism and macho aggression was wrongheaded on the international stage, and at home his rule proved to be antithetical to the freedom of the press, women's reproductive rights, and hopes for climate action and environmental protections.

> "It was miraculous. It was almost no trick at all, he saw, to turn vice into virtue and slander into truth, impotence into abstinence, arrogance into humility, plunder into philanthropy, thievery into honor, blasphemy into wisdom, brutality into patriotism, and sadism into justice. Anybody could do it; it required no brains at all. It merely required no character."
>
> --- Joseph Heller, *Catch-22*

Aided by the Trump tornado, today's Republicans are taking an exceptionally hard-line stance on immigration that contrasts unfavorably with the more admirable position expressed by Ronald Reagan in his farewell address from the White House in 1989. Reagan referred to John Winthrop's journey to the United States, the English Puritan who imagined America as a "city upon a hill", and described Winthrop's idea of a "shining city" as one that was "teeming with people of all kinds living in harmony and peace." He added, "If there had to be city walls, the walls had doors and the doors were open to anyone with the will and the heart to get here."

In expressing their strong stances against young Dreamer residents of the U.S. and immigration "amnesty" and allowing refugees into the States, today's hard-right Republicans are launching fusillades against "political correctness", and are rationalizing blatant racism and discrimination. In doing so, they are tortuously twisting their rhetoric to justify blaming and scapegoating non-whites and people of other faiths, and are demonstrating

intolerant religious antagonism.

The pathological strategy of today's Republican politicians to exploit anxieties and fears of the American people to gain power is, in effect, preying on their susceptibilities and vulnerabilities. One pathetic outcome is that the best interests of the vast majority of Americans are poorly represented in our politics. This, it seems obvious, is due to the fact that our political system has been corrupted by Big Money and the Supreme Court's narrow ruling that moneyed interests can use their money with few limits. This is a good reason why our system can accurately be said to be one of legalized institutional bribery. We really need to enact new laws, and Move to Amend the Constitution to once again give our democratic republic an honorably fair form of governance.

Gambling in the Bet Situation

We exist in a "Bet Situation", as described by the 17th century French scientist Blaise Pascal. First, we are inextricably involved in the game. Second, there are many uncertainties, and third, it is important to us in our own lives, and to our fellow human beings, that we make decisions that are more conscious, conscientious, and socially responsible with regard to a variety of important categories of bets we are collectively making.

One of the most significant gambles we make is to suppose that resource limitations don't matter because technology will save us by finding replacements for resources as we use them up. Resource conservation is a much smarter plan than such rationalizations of wasteful usages. It is also true that innovation is crucial to our adapting in the future, and many technological advances are going to be needed to satisfy our growing needs for food, fresh water and energy, and to prevent or mitigate problems associated with a destabilized climate and increasing crowds of human beings. Advances in technology can also have deleterious impacts. As an instance, they can be a cause of wide-ranging problems like much more effective ways of killing large numbers of people.

It would be a clearly smarter plan to place some of our bets on a "no-regrets" approach that would result in less rash gambles about whether or not technology will indeed save us. By making such bets, we would sensibly act to conserve natural resources like fossil fuels, crucial minerals, topsoil and fresh water, and we would help protect the vital biological systems found in tropical rainforests, old-growth temperate forests, unpolluted wetlands, mangrove nurseries, free-flowing streams, river deltas, healthy coral reefs and sustainable ocean fisheries.

The smartest course of action, in other words, is to place our bets on understandings that are most accurate! Someday, check out Chapter 38 of *Comprehensive Global Perspective* online for a summary the 14 principal gambles we are collectively making, along with illuminating ideas on the most sensible bets we should be taking.

The exciting story of the genesis and evolution of innovative industries in famous Silicon Valley provides us with valuable insights and good lessons. Steve Jobs, one of the greatest innovators in world history, was known for encouraging people to "Think Different", and to work to embrace life, "change it, improve it, and make your mark upon it." Silicon Valley became fertile grounds for innovation because it had a concentration of really smart scientists and engineers in the Bay Area of Northern California. People there cultivated an attitude of open-mindedness and a willingness to question conventional wisdom. It was also fortuitous that Silicon Valley was far away from the overly regimented and stifling hierarchy of traditional big businesses back east.

The then-new Venture Capital industry played a vital role in providing necessary financing to creative enterprises in Silicon Valley. Venture capitalists provided risk capital and also helped assemble brilliant people and promote new technologies and provide organizational guidance and oversight.

Gordon MacKenzie, an ombudsman who worked at Hallmark Cards for 30 years, provides readers with some provocative insights in his book *Orbiting the Giant Hairball*. McKenzie shares the story of his own professional evolution, "together with lessons on awakening and fostering creative genius." He recommended that people create a proper distance from the tangled and impenetrable mass of rules and bureaucracy and traditions that exercise an inexorably stultifying pull in stodgy organizations. A good balance between adequate structure and freewheeling latitude is healthy on many levels.

Silicon Valley gained great success after the Soviet Union shocked people in the U.S. by launching Sputnik, mankind's first satellite, into orbit in 1957. Realizing the need for technological innovation in electronics and

rocket science propulsion and aerospace engineering, President Dwight Eisenhower soon thereafter created the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. Then, in 1961, President John Kennedy committed the nation to putting a man on the Moon within a decade, and we proudly did so in July 1969. Visionary commitments, good organization, and flexibility in approach can help us accomplish great goals.

A "Rent-Seeking" Rip-Off

Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney, campaigning in Iowa in 2011, smugly declared, "Corporations are people, my friend". I have always felt strong disagreement with the premise that corporations deserve to be given the full rights in courts of law that are constitutionally assured to real people. Too many abuses of power have been made using rationalizations like the one that says the Fourteenth Amendment guarantees corporate entities the same rights as individuals of Due Process and Equal Protection.

Drastic increases in corporate power are anti-democratic. Republicans can accurately be seen as representing government of business interests, by corporations and corrupt politicians, and for rich people. One of the most detrimental aspects of Mitt Romney's proposals was the idea that we should give more power to big corporations. When he asserted that corporations are people, it begged an important question: if huge multinational corporations are people, then exactly what kind of people are they?

Professor Joel Bakan answered this question in his provocative book *The Corporation: The Pathological Pursuit of Profit and Power,* and in the thought-provoking film *The Corporation*. He found that big corporations all-too-often fit the profile of a "psychopathic person", as judged by criteria in the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders.* Corporations often show a reckless disregard for the safety of others, a callous unconcern for the feelings of workers and consumers, and a pathetic incapacity to experience guilt. Tellingly, they also often demonstrate an eagerness to deceive people through persuasive marketing and engage in cost-externalizing gambits oriented toward making bigger profits by foisting costs onto society. And they frequently fail to conform to social norms with respect to lawful behavior. They definitely do not resemble either good friends or considerate neighbors.

It is compelling to consider this fact that corporations all too often act in ways that resemble behaviors exhibited by psychopathic individuals. The inescapable conclusion is that we should not give corporations the same legal rights as real people. When the Supreme Court issued its narrow 5-4 ruling on the *Citizens United* case, it gave rich people and corporate interests the right to subvert our democracy by spending ever larger amounts of money on propaganda and lobbying so they can gain more power. This spending has had the negative effect of helping politicians realize their hubristic self-serving plans to wield excessive power over the people.

Another way that corporations play hardball with city, county, state and federal governments is by demanding that they be given a variety of free services, tax incentives, property tax abatements, cash grants, loans, sales tax breaks, and income tax credits and exemptions. These perks cost taxpayers tens of billions of dollars every year. These overly generous provisions divert money from public education and other important priorities, and force states and municipalities to cut public services or raise taxes. Laura Reese, director of the Global Urban Studies Program at Michigan State University, advises local governments to invest in local residents through education and training rather than by giving big incentives to companies, where it is harder to pick winners. Such strategies would be smarter development priorities!

During his business career, Mitt Romney routinely took advantage of the rigged provisions of the capitalist system to make huge profits by using no-value-added "vulture capitalist" schemes and tax evasion swindles. He acted in ruthless, shrewdly calculating, cold-hearted ways in his hedge fund dealings and debt-leveraging gambits. He subsequently tried to spin the story of his career into a narrative that portrayed him as a person primarily interested in creating jobs, and who really cared about workers and the middle class. He tried to act like he is an honorable nice guy who is fair-minded and reasonable. But these characterizations turned out to be transparently inaccurate. Then along came the even more unscrupulous con man Donald Trump, who has been cataclysmically less ethical than Mitt Romney in his pursuit of power, and Romney has surprisingly come to be markedly more honorable than Donald Trump and his MAGA cult followers.

Romney's many policy flip-flops and his slick rhetoric were overwhelmingly motivated by selfish advantages, not by broad-mindedness. By covering up the details of his tax returns during his run for president, and hiding details he may have had of his fiscal plans for the U.S., and disingenuously concealing his true agenda if he were to have gained power, he gave people good cause to doubt his honesty and integrity. We could not have afforded to gamble that a good Mitt would have shown up in the White House rather than a conniving, exploitive, aggressively self-interested, inequality-championing Mitt. And no one knew what kind of Trump would show up if he were to be elected, but once we found out, it was an unmitigated and deadly disaster!

Conservatives want corporations to make bigger bottom line profits, so they love cheap labor, and thus oppose fairer treatment of women and equal pay. Women are a disproportionately large component of the middle class and working poor, so extreme conservative positions significantly undermine the hopes and well-being of these crucial segments of society. And females make up about two-thirds of people who earn minimum wages, so opposition to increases in this wage has a direct negative affect on women. The history of a minimum wage requirement is an interesting one. It was started in 1938 during the Depression, and reached its highest real value (adjusted for inflation) in 1968. Since then, its value has gone down by about one third, and minimum wages have never been enough to keep a family above poverty level with only one family member working.

Borderline Criminality

Being open-minded, I've given consideration to alternate points of view. Maybe we *should* treat corporations like persons -- especially when it comes to socially responsible behavior. Imagine a group of felons walking into 10,000 of Texas-based 7-Eleven's convenience stores and stealing the entire inventory of every one of them, and then being caught red-handed -- but NOT being required to pay any penalty or give back any of the stolen merchandise. Absolutely preposterous, right?

This is basically what happened with the biotech firm Amgen. The company had just been fined $612 million in December 2012 for criminally defrauding the Medicare program by manipulating prices and giving kickbacks. Despite having cheated taxpayers with these illegal schemes, lobbyists for Amgen managed just two weeks later to slip an obscure provision into the legislation that allayed the "fiscal cliff crisis". When the Senate passed the American Taxpayer Relief Act in the early morning hours of January 1, 2013, Congress rewarded Amgen with a two-year delay in Medicare price restraints on Sensipar, the company's kidney dialysis drug. This gave Amgen a big benefit that will cost American taxpayers an estimated $500 million -- an amount equivalent to the entire inventory of all 10,000 of those 7-Eleven's. Amgen was caught red-handed, but was nevertheless given a big windfall that will result from this lobbyist shenanigan.

In a banana republic, we would call this a sensational instance of political corruption. But in the United States, this is business as usual. It is just one of many of the undesirable results of allowing corporations to retain large numbers of lobbyists to gain unfair advantages -- and of allowing big businesses and rich people to corrupt our politics by making outsized political donations to our representatives.

The Impact of Illegitimate Partisans on the Supreme Court

Most consequential of all for the Republican crusade to gain power was their strategy to stack the Supreme Court with proponents of corporate power and privilege like Samuel Alito, and highly partisan conservatives like Clarence Thomas, and ideological stalwarts like the late Antonin Scalia, and political partisans like Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh and the religious fundamentalist Amy Coney Barrett. They want to do this so that their anti-democratic influence will be perpetuated for generations rather than merely in the short run, when their arrogance of power will be slapped down by voters angry at seeing exactly what the real impacts are, concealed behind all the bombast, deceit, devious blame-shifting, flag-waving rhetoric and bad prescriptions.

After having heard that Justice Antonin Scalia's had died suddenly in February 2016, the thought occurred to me, "What diabolical timing!" On the very day of the 7th Republican debate among a dwindling field of some of the most extreme presidential candidates in history, Scalia's death sparked immediate tensions over the future composition of the Supreme Court. And since the appointment of a more liberal Justice at the time would have tipped the scales toward progressive rulings, and away from conservative positions on both corporate

prerogatives and hot button social issues, this unexpected development had monumental ramifications.

It would be supremely cynical to suppose that the Devil had a hand in Justice Scalia's sudden death. During that session of the Supreme Court, a historically consequential docket of cases was pending, so it was a juncture in history that was extraordinary. Antonin Scalia died just after another of many narrowly ideological and anti-progressive 5-4 rulings against the common good, which included a provisional decision against President Obama's Clean Air legislation that sent shockwaves across the world, coming as it did after the historic Paris Climate Accords. "May we live in interesting times!" This development made me marvel about whether this reputed old Chinese saying is a curse or a blessing, because Scalia's death suddenly cast much more significance on the ideological composition of the Court during a highly contentious primary election season. Since the long-term impact of the composition of the highest court in the land will have even more significance than who wins a presidential election, the heightened attention to the Supreme Court provided a sensational shaft of light on the implications of who was to choose future Supreme Court Justices.

Nine months later, Trump grabbed power, helped by Mitch McConnell's refusal to let President Obama appoint a replacement for Scalia. And the two managed to stack federal courts with more than 230 "conservative" judges. It is now time to reject on-going Republican bids for their ability to abuse power. They pose too big a threat to democratic governance, and are intent on denying fairer representation to the people. Their goals are wrong to give more and more power to corporate entities, and to exacerbate growing inequalities.

The Supreme Court's *Citizens United* ruling and later McCutcheon decision are facilitating wrongful abuses of money for power, and in turn, this is making it easier to abuse power to get money. This downward spiral of perverted principles and betrayed trust give the American people good reason to feel deeply cynical about their political representatives. Master manipulators are stoking people's grievances and causing their anger to be misdirected towards liberals and government, with the upshot that the figurative bad guys are winning, and are working feverishly to deceive the people by pretending to be the ones who are wearing the white hats.

These slick and wily politicians really want to gain increasingly domineering power in order to enable them to push through many of their anti-populist top priorities. Here is what they are trying do:

(1) Give more of the nation's wealth to high-income earners and wealthy people.
(2) Cut spending on environmental protections and family planning programs and affordable insurance for healthcare for millions of people, including financing for Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security and food stamps.
(3) Reduce regulations on businesses, especially on big banks and on giant corporations that sell fossil fuels and prescription drugs and guns.
(4) Give "personhood rights" to sprawling octopus-like corporate entities, even though this can result in trends that are highly contrary to the common good due to the fact that corporations are amoral and anti-democratic by design. They do, after all, have just two main legal purposes: to limit liability of owners and to maximize profits for shareholders.
(5) Increase spending on the military, and be more aggressive in "coercive diplomacy", and intervening in the domestic affairs of people in other nations around the world.
(6) Eliminate the right to choose to terminate a pregnancy for any woman, no matter what man got her pregnant or how his seed got into her fallopian tube. They do this in favor of giving the rights of personhood to a clump of cells from the moment of conception, while opposing the rights and prerogatives and provisions for the well-being of women and children.

Listen, my fellow Americans, these "conservatives" are "sugar-coating manure and pretending they are creating a doughnut." Let's not be so gullible as to believe this unsavory sleight of hand. Throw these shrewd operators out of office so that we can have new leaders who commit to enacting fairer, more reasonable plans.

Serious consideration should be given to the extent that a deep current of racism still affects our American society. This racist attitude was manifested in the blatant hostility by Republicans to President Obama. The country western singer Merle Haggard made this provocative observation in 2010: "It's really almost criminal what they do with our President. There seems to be no shame or anything. They call him all kinds of names all day long, saying he's doing certain things that he's not. It's just a big old political game that I don't want to be

part of. There are people spending their lives putting him down."

Colin Powell spoke out on this issue in 2013 during an appearance on Meet The Press, when he condemned a GOP "dark vein of intolerance" and the party's repeated use of racial code words to oppose President Obama and to rally white conservative voters. Without mentioning names, Colin Powell (who died in October 2021) singled out former Mitt Romney surrogate and New Hampshire Governor John Sununu for calling Obama "lazy", and Sarah Palin, who used slavery-era terms to describe Obama. Powell stated: "There's also a dark vein of intolerance in some parts of the party. What do I mean by that? I mean by that they still sort of look down on minorities. How can I evidence that? When I see a former governor say that the President is "shuckin' and jivin'," that's racial era slave term. When I see another former governor after the president's first debate where he didn't do very well, says that the president was lazy. He didn't say he was slow, or tired, or didn't do well. He said he was lazy. Now, it may not mean anything to most Americans, but to those of us who are African Americans, the second word is shiftless and then there's a third word that goes along with that. The birther, the whole birther movement. Why do senior Republican leaders tolerate this kind of discussion within the party?"

Consider the Far-Reaching Influence of the Supreme Court

There is another crucial issue that makes it propitious for American voters to have rejected the bid by conservatives for the presidency in 2012, and it is a provocative reason why they should have done so again in 2016. Since federal court judges and Supreme Court Justices are appointed for life, the ability for advocates of far right dogmas to be able to stack the courts with more ideological conservatives would let them give more unaccountable power to corporations and rich persons for generations to come. This would further undermine representation that is truly fair to all the American people. Courts that are more conservative provide excessive energy to pet causes of right-wing politicians, like reducing protections of public lands and the environment and endangered species. Such strengthening of market fundamentalist agendas incidentally has served to energize efforts to overturn *Roe vs. Wade* women's rights, and onerously erodes the civil liberties of millions of Americans. For further perspective, see my essay *Women's Rights: Let Freedom Ring – Honestly!*

In times of increased insecurity and social crisis, it is easier for strong authoritarian types to seize the bigger opportunities to gain power. Freedom lovers, take note of this! Increasing inequities make everyone less secure, and by letting our leaders mainly represent the interests of the richest Americans, we make crises more likely. It will be a tragic day for the world if voters let conservatives gain more power in the November 2022 elections. It is sensational that our nation, founded in reaction to the tyranny of the British Empire in the 18th century, is so close to being bamboozled into electing more of the people who are sedulously selling similar swindles. Election deniers and seditious Trump Republicans pose an existential threat of bringing our great American experiment in democratic government to an ignominious end.

Let us now demand that our leaders begin to chart a much more responsible course to a fairer future. Let's also demand that all our representatives join together to formulate wiser, more moderate and more long-term-oriented policies that are consistent with the greater good. We must Build Back Better!

Freedom and Equality

Mark Twain famously declared that we have the best government that money can buy. When we allow our representatives to be sold to the highest bidder, we would be crazy to expect any other outcome than that rich people and highly profitable corporations would corrupt our national decision-making.

"The concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the few is the death knell of democracy."

--- *We're Not in Lake Wobegon Anymore,* Garrison Keillor

The increasing concentration of wealth and power that has been taking place in the USA since 1980 is unfair to the majority of people, so it is contrary to the founding principles of our democracy.

Money is power due to its large influence in our elections and in Congress. Big Money represents excessive power because of its defining impact on the laws enacted and benefits provided in our country. Large numbers of lobbyists work continuously to influence legislation, and their influence is unwarranted when they manipulate

people's perceptions by means of slick marketing, deceitful political advertising, misleading spin and sneaky provisions inserted into legislation.

Former Louisiana Senator John Breaux declared in 1981, after getting huge sugar subsidies inserted into tax-cut legislation: "My vote can't be bought, but it can be rented." In our revolving-door system, many politicians retire from politics to become well-paid lobbyists after their terms in office. This is another sad aspect of distorting and corrupting influences in our political system.

When the Supreme Court ruled in the *Citizens United* case that rich people and big corporations and labor unions could spend unlimited amounts of money on elections, Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens strongly expressed his dissent from the narrow decision. He declared it to be "a rejection of the common sense of the American people, who have recognized a need to prevent corporations from undermining self-government since the founding, and who have fought against the distinctive corrupting potential of corporate electioneering since the days of Theodore Roosevelt." So true!

The great progressive Senator Paul Wellstone would be turning over in his grave if he could see that the efforts he made to institute sensible campaign finance reforms were posthumously overturned by the Supreme Court in the *Citizens United* ruling. And many Americans are beginning to dislike our democracy because of the obvious extent that it means being exposed to a negative hyper-barrage of manipulative attack ads and urgent fundraising appeals and often dishonest political messages. Let's demand that Big Money be ejected from the driver's seat of our election campaigns! People are beginning to have an intense distaste for the divisiveness of our two monopolistic political parties, so fairer compromises are needed now. People of the world, unite!

The trend for our economic and political systems to be corrupted by the influence of Big Money has gotten significantly worse since the Supreme Court rejected long-standing precedents in *Citizens United*. It is an affront to fair-minded principles of a democratic republic to allow unlimited amounts of money to be spent by wealthy people and profit-prepossessed corporations to buy our representatives and influence our elections and profoundly corrupt our policy-making.

When the *Citizens United* decision gave special interest groups much more power, it effectively diminished the voices of the people. The ruling was made only because corporate apologists who approve of this unfair trend narrowly dominated the Supreme Court. The resulting tsunami of money has had distinctly detrimental effects on our elections and on fairness in Congressional decision-making. This fact proves that the ruling has been one of the worst decisions ever made by the Supreme Court.

<u>The Costs of Increasing Inequality</u>

Since the bottom-line result of Republican policies that gained force beginning with the presidency of Ronald Reagan has been to increase the wealth concentration in the hands of the few, the desperation of the bottom 50% of the American people has increased. This outcome has resulted from three primary "conservative" initiatives: (1) the implementation of highly regressive changes in taxation like Ronald Reagan's radical reduction in tax rates on the highest levels of incomes; (2) the undermining of collective bargaining power of American workers while corporate entities have been given more power, more tax loopholes, and more ways to privatize profits by socializing costs; and (3) the actions that have driven up the federal debt from under $1 trillion in 1981 to $31 trillion today to finance stimulative economic policies and ramped up military spending, all the while allowing rich people to pay the lowest tax rates in generations at the direct expense of everyone else, tragically including all people in the future.

Almost all the financial benefits of productivity increases in the past few decades have been usurped by the top ten percent of Americans by means of these three gambits. This is a "rent-seeking" outcome that is a form of redistribution of the nation's wealth from working people to wealthy investors. The fact that these investors are allowed to pay very low capital gains taxes on the income they get from these activities is blatantly unfair to workers who must pay higher tax rates on the income they receive for their work. This outcome in the struggle between capitalists and workers was one of the main goals of Ronald Reagan's policies, just as it was for the policies of George W. Bush. And, this was a principal goal of the sketchy economic proposals that Mitt Romney

and Paul Ryan made during their failed 2012 presidential campaign. And in 2016, all Republican politicians sided with perpetuating this regressive aspect of the status quo. And once Trump was elected, despite getting almost 3 million votes fewer than Hillary Clinton, scheming Republicans managed to pass a Tax Cut Act in December 2017, by a vote of 51-50 in the Senate, that gave the Trump family alone many millions of dollars in benefits.

This state of affairs is not only outrageously contrary to the broad-minded founding principles of our democratic republic, but it is also economically foolish. Because consumer spending accounts for about 70% of economic activity in the U.S., when the financial well-being of the majority of people is undermined, the economy ends up in the doldrums. This contributes to stagnant demand, and serves to increase the number of people who do not have jobs, and to create an undesirable feedback loop that makes this situation inexorably worse.

Joseph Stiglitz makes a convincing case in *The Price of Inequality* that, when rich people seize a larger share of the economic pie for themselves, their actions make the size of the pie smaller than it otherwise would be. This is due to the suppressive effect on economic growth of wealth being highly concentrated. The pie is smaller than it would be with a fairer wealth distribution -- despite deceitful conservative contentions to the contrary.

The goal of giving rich people more money is being achieved by taking unfair advantage of the main institutional mechanisms that facilitate the concentration of wealth: allowing corporations to usurp domineering power and abuse it for self-interested purposes, and letting deceptive ideological assertions and scaremongering tactics sway many voters and election contests. Our Founders would be shocked, awed and dismayed!

A Preview of Things to Come

There are first-rate reasons why a different national "redistribution" of income is not only a good idea, but an overarching necessity. The current distribution has been shrewdly rigged to give an excessive proportion of the benefits of economic activities to the top 1% of Americans, so this system has become injudiciously skewed to misguided objectives.

Public policies change the distribution of income, as they have done since Ronald Reagan began reversing progressive tax policies by slashing marginal tax rates on the highest income earners by a whopping 60% in the 1980s. Less obvious, but possibly even more influential, are government policies that have enormous effects on the distribution of income *before taxes or government benefits are taken into account.* Public policies establish "the rules of the game", so they have determinative effects by putting laws into effect that affect trade, copyrights, contracts, corporate governance, securities, capital, labor rules, minimum wages, overtime pay and government regulations related to banks, financial markets and entrepreneurial ventures. A wide variety of exceptionally special deals are also given to vested interest groups, and the Federal Reserve pursues policies that lopsidedly aid and abet the appreciation in rich people's assets.

Systemic corruption has allowed an antisocial domination of our society by those who champion a crazy form of capitalistic "socialism of the rich, by the rich, and for the rich." This system gives unwarranted perks to rich people, crony capitalists and big corporations, CEOs and their lobbyists. It is a self-reinforcing and politically enabled monster that really should be more reasonably regulated. Being a gal who is inspired by legitimate and peaceable methods, and being highly respectful of Solon-wise governance, I call for non-violent revolutionary reforms as soon as possible that consequentially change our economic and political systems.

Since there are so many ways these systems are rigged, the most expedient way to immediately accomplish this change is by leaving all provisions of the current established system as they are and implementing more steeply graduated taxes on income, capital gains and inheritances. These changes should be made effective ASAP. This revision in the tax code should be designed to reduce budget deficits and simultaneously provide increased funding for investments in healthcare for all, public education, needed national infrastructure, convenient public transportation, conservation programs and protections of the environment.

Then, having used this broad-stroke expediency to set straighter our national finances, we should begin to fix our economic and political systems. One good reason we need to make our tax system more progressive is so that everyone will be able to afford the first fix that should be enacted: an immediate increase in federal gasoline taxes by $1 per gallon, with these funds being used to fairly offset the higher costs to those who can't

afford it. At the same time we should begin dealing aggressively with our shifting utilitarian necessities, like making investments in cleaner renewable energy, reducing the profligate and polluting waste of fossil fuels, and cutting down on the amount of greenhouse gas emissions being spewed into the atmosphere. These steps should be taken to make our societies fairer and more sustainable. The justifications and parameters of the wide-ranging reforms required are spelled out in this Common Sense Revival, and specifically in *One Dozen Big Initiatives to Positively Transform Our Societies.*

A Shockingly Fair-Minded Plan

If we really want to make our system fairer, we would formulate a restitution plan for the fiscal swindles that have resulted in the increase of the national debt by more than $30 trillion since 1980. One way to do this would be to require wealthy people to give up some of the enormous gains they have received in the past 40 years by assessing a one-time wealth tax that would reduce the national debt by $5 trillion from the current level. Presto! -- the risk of a debt crisis would suddenly be reduced.

Just think about it. Such an action would increase the overall average well-being and security of the American people, and the costs and risks of increasing inequities would be attenuated, and truer prosperity could reign.

Imagine my surprise, considering the radical nature of this proposal, as detailed below, when I stumbled across an eminently convincing analysis by the Boston Consulting Group that actually recommended the assessment of a One-Time Wealth Tax on rich people in order to get our financial state in sound order. The Boston group's report was titled *Back to Mesopotamia?: Looming Threat of Debt Restructuring.* The authors astutely contend that the price could be very high for nations worldwide to continue kicking the can down the road by failing to address the root causes of a looming potential national debt crisis. A continuing failure to act would significantly increase risks that "an unconstrained financial and economic crisis" will afflict the U.S. and global economy. This would be a disastrous outcome, and could make the recession of 2008-2009 look like a picnic in the park. The authors painstakingly calculate that a one-time wealth tax of an average 25% of the financial assets of the wealthiest Americans would resolve this dangerous dilemma.

A few years after I first considered this proposal, the respected French economist Thomas Piketty wrote a relative blockbuster titled *Capital in the Twenty-First Century,* and in this monumental 700-page book he also indicated that a global wealth tax would be a good plan for civilized societies.

Here is the background idea to support this proposal. Toward the end of 2011, our nation's attention was focused on efforts by a so-called Super Committee to come up with a plan to cut $1.5 trillion from an anticipated $10 trillion in additional deficits projected to be incurred in the decade to follow. The super-partisan Super Committee was unable to agree to any debt deal, so an automatic "fiscal cliff" of budget cuts was created that went into effect in January 2013. The 15% reduction they were seeking was actually a completely inadequate amount. At the time, President Obama had proposed a "grand compromise" of a $4 trillion reduction, but even that amount was not really enough. After all, such a reduction would still have left us indulging in the shortsighted expediency of borrowing another $6 trillion from every taxpayer in every future year to finance low tax rates for rich people and high levels of spending.

Almost all Americans have been complicit in wanting lower taxes, while our aggregate demands have driven increases in federal government spending. But Americans want these things without having to pay for them. The only beneficiaries that have big bucks to show for the foolishly expedient courses of action we have been pursuing since 1980 are the top 20% of Americans who own more than 90% of the total net worth in America.

Most of this total net worth in the U.S. is highly concentrated at the top. The richest 1% of people own over 40% of all non-home wealth. This includes stocks, bonds, business equity, trust funds, savings accounts, non-home real estate, and the cash value of life insurance and pension plans. This concentration of wealth has been facilitated by rash reductions in taxes on top income earners, the outcome initiated by Ronald Reagan when he so drastically slashed tax rates on the top levels of income.

Let's go figure. The total net worth of all Americans in the U.S. is probably about $115 trillion in October 2022. Of this, home equity is a record nearly $29 trillion. So there is a net $86 trillion in financial wealth in the U.S., and the richest 1% of Americans who own more than 40% of this wealth thus have over $34 trillion in assets.

This represents an asset increase for the top 1% up from $3 trillion they had in 1980. Santa Claus tax-cutting scams have resulted in borrowings by the federal government of more than $30 trillion during this period. A direct correlation exists here: we have in effect given the richest 1% of Americans over $30 trillion by borrowing it from every taxpayer in the future. The interest expense obligations on borrowed money will total an additional $20 trillion every 15 to 20 years or so, depending on prevailing interest rates, so we will be forced to pay this huge cost over and over and over again, or add it to the accumulating national debt.

This borrowing-to-enrich-the-rich scheme is not highway robbery, grand larceny or an armed bank hold-up. It could sensibly be regarded as the biggest financial swindle in world history, and it is a crime being committed against our children and all people in future years. There has, of course, been wider participation in this wealth embezzlement scheme than just the top 1% of Americans who have been ring leaders and primary beneficiaries. The top 20% of Americans who own more than 90% of the total financial net worth also have been beneficiaries.

Our nation is desperately seeking a solution to *Seven Primary Challenges We Must Honestly Deal With*, which are spelled out in *Happy Harbingers in Good Ideas for a Better Future* (see page 186 of this *Common Sense Revival).* Our failure to solve these problems endangers our national security and well-being. The richest 1% of Americans unquestionably hold the key to these solutions, so we should look to them for restitution for the monumental scam that they have been perpetrating. We must demand that they Stand and Deliver!

The principal of restitution is an integral part of virtually every formal system of criminal justice. Perpetrators of financial crimes are required to make payment to the victims of their malfeasance. The civil justice system also has provisions for civil recovery of losses and damages. This civil justice system does not attempt to determine the guilt or innocence of offenders, or to incarcerate them. Civil courts assess the amount of liabilities that scam perpetrators have, including both offenders and third-party participants. They do this to objectively determine the harms sustained as a result of particular criminal activities.

Here is a restitution proposal that would have a collateral benefit of reducing the likelihood of a national debt crisis. Here's the plan. Let's call it a Fair Play Wealth Assessment. Immediately assess $5 trillion to the richest people in the U.S. This $5 trillion will only be a part of the more than $40 trillion possessed by the wealthiest people in the country. Make this wealth assessment progressive, assessing it to the following four groups of advantaged people, and fairly graduating it, as follows:

(1) Americans whose net worth is between $1 million and $5 million	$ 1.0 trillion
(2) Americans whose net worth is between $5 million and $20 million	1.0 trillion
(3) Americans whose net worth is between $20 million and $100 million	1.5 trillion
(4) Americans whose net worth is more than $100 million	1,5 trillion
Total One-Time Assessment	$ 5.0 trillion

This Fair Play Wealth Assessment should be due upon death. Those who are assessed can choose to pay this principal balance at any time, with 5% interest payable annually on any amounts that are unpaid. To most fairly apportion this assessment to each person within these categories, assess whatever percent is needed to achieve the group's targeted revenue contributions. The calculations or categories should be adjusted as appropriate to ensure that it is fairest for all, and to ensure that no individual's net worth is reduced by more than:

Category (1):	5%
Category (2):	15%
Category (3):	40%
Category (4):	60%

Presto! At the stroke of a pen, we would reduce the national debt by $5 trillion. That would significantly mitigate the debt problem here in the United States, and it would make our economic system more stable and our citizens more secure. Europeans should follow suit to solve their own serious debt problems by a similar

initiative, because their debts have also been engendered in part by similar swindles by wealthy people who have abused the influence of their money.

We could decide to distribute 10% of the $5 trillion in proceeds, or a total of $500 billion, to all the estimated 150 million Americans who are so financially insecure that they have an average net worth of less than $15,000. This plan would diminish the extreme insecurity of half the people in our nation and stimulate the economy by giving these people money to spend for things they need.

This plan would also have the big advantage that it would help poor people afford the higher costs of needed mandates to internalize costs that are currently being externalized. These mandates should be put into effect to provide powerful incentives for resource conservation, and to promote the efficiency of resource usages and a sustained move toward renewable alternatives.

At the same time, we should honestly tackle the forces that drive annual budget deficits. Our goal should be to formulate a plan that is fair to taxpayers in the future by keeping the national debt from ever again exceeding 100% of GDP. The only other time in U.S. history, other than the past 5 years, that our national debt exceeded 100% of GDP was shortly after World War II, when debt had been incurred to combat the world-conquering militaristic ambitions of despotic leaders in Hitler's Germany, Mussolini's Italy and Emperor Hirohito's Japan. Today, we have incurred this dangerously high level of debt for a much less necessary purpose -- to give corporations and high-income earners the freedom to shirk the responsibility that comes from being the primary beneficiaries of the way our economic and political systems are structured.

A natural conclusion would be that we should re-structure our economic and political systems to prevent abuses of power by those who take advantage of the system at the expense of the general public and people in the future. Having mitigated concerns over this global debt crisis by means of this restitution plan, we should then proceed to make our world safer, more mutually secure, greener, and more committed to sustainable ways of living. This leads directly to proposals in *One Dozen Big Initiatives to Positively Transform Our Societies*.

Observations about Political Compromise

Our political system has always involved give-and-take compromises between various interest groups competing for perks, privileges and power. Since conservatives have become much more uncompromising over the past 20 years, many Republicans have taken a "purity pledge" to anti-tax iconoclast Grover Norquist, whose overriding conviction is that the government should be shrunk down "to the size where we can drown it in the bathtub." These people regard the elimination of tens or hundreds of thousands of jobs in the public sector as a goal more important than the common good.

This orthodox purity is a stubborn refusal to compromise, and a crude, fantastically simplistic form of dogmatic ideology that requires adherents to suspend disbelief and throw in with the narrowly self-serving goals of the rich. This plan is cynically contrary to the general welfare of the citizenry. It is sad that such efforts have been accompanied by a tendency for the Republican Party to become more socially reactionary in recent years.

During the pandemic in 2020, Mitch McConnell, for his own usual diabolically self-interested reasons, wanted to let state and local governments go bankrupt, instead of bailing them out like the federal government did in March 2020 when it began shoveling $3 trillion in relief to Big Businesses, Small Businesses, tax breaks to the rich, and stimulus payments and unemployment benefits to individuals. In borrowing so lavishly, plans to preserve employment relationships were foolishly neglected, with 40 million persons having initially lost jobs.

Republicans support plans that seem to be designed to foist a reactionary form of social engineering on the American people, and to deprive women of family planning options and rights to make personal decisions relating to their healthcare, reproductive choices and childbearing. It's astonishing that many GOP politicians who run for office have a chance of winning despite advocating misogynistic policies like the official plank in the Republican platform that opposes all abortions, with no exceptions for pregnancies resulting from rape or incest or that put the life of a pregnant woman at risk. In 2012, Paul Ryan supported this plank, as did "legitimate rape" Missourian Todd Akin and Indiana's Richard Mourdock, who stated that when a woman becomes pregnant

from a rape, "it is something that God intended." Mourdock went on to say that the government should prohibit a woman from getting an abortion even if a rapist got her pregnant. That attitude is obscene!

In many countries, religious freedom is severely limited by patriarchal cultures, and males are assumed to have a God-given right to restrict women's freedoms and rights. An important aspect of the freedom of religion that is guaranteed by the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights is the freedom from religion -- i.e., the freedom from unreasonable dictates of religious authorities. The attitudes of Republicans in state legislatures, like those passing rigid abortion bans, are brutally antagonistic to the health and well-being of women, and their personal rights and contraceptive options and abortion. These generally white male politicians seem to vow, Taliban-like, to have the government impose restrictions on women's prerogatives, and to limit their rights and deprive them of the liberty to make personal reproductive decisions in their lives. All Americans should oppose such tyranny!

Everyone should be guaranteed the freedom to believe whatever religious stories they fancy, even ones that have been interpreted to mean that Earth is a mere 6,000 years old, despite scientific certainty that our home planet has been orbiting the Sun for billions of years. When people cling to beliefs that contradict scientific understandings in ways that are consequentially harmful, however, these beliefs cannot be allowed to have determining sway in our policy-making. As a compelling instance, the belief that human actions are acceptable when they result in billions of tons of greenhouse gases being spewed into the atmosphere every year is to have blind faith in a harm-causing lack of accurate comprehension. Since such a belief has enormous costs, it cannot be allowed to prevent us from instituting measures that would mitigate associated risks.

It is noteworthy that two primary camps existed among our Founders: those who advocated Jeffersonian ideals and those who advocated Hamiltonian ideals. Jeffersonians believed in equality of opportunity and democratic fairness, and they gave priority to plain folk. They believed that effective rules should be established in order to protect people from abuses of power by aristocratic elites and those who demand outsized special privileges. Hamiltonians, in contrast, were federalist nationalists who emphasized the importance of having a strong Constitution and a federal government with expansive centralized powers, particularly in arenas of funding the state, building infrastructure, paying for national defense, and establishing trade relations with other countries.

Debates were acrimonious back then, but the Founders managed to compromise together to form a more perfect Union. Today's Republicans? "Damn the Union!" they seem to be saying. "Preserve low tax rates for the rich! And tough luck to women, gay people, immigrants and our descendants!" And in 2022, "Damn democracy." Perhaps we need a good therapist to reconcile these dysfunctional relationships!

An Appeal for Courageous Fair-Minded Voices

At a time that we obviously need more inclusively fair decision making, it is instructive to see instances in history when leaders subverted the greater good. One egregious example of this was revealed when a member of the inner ranks of George W. Bush's administration was fired. This purge of a reasonable voice took place in December 2002 with the firing of Lawrence B. Lindsey, the director of the National Economic Council at the time and an advisor to the president on economic policy. Think about the circumstances. Lindsey had publicly provided a projection of the cost of a contemplated preemptive war on Iraq to be in the range of $200 billion. This contradicted both the shrewd war profiteer Vice President Dick Cheney and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, who were trying to sell estimates that the war would cost less than $50 billion.

As it turned out, these leaders were involved in a bizarrely brazen, deeply duplicitous and insensibly zealous crusade to promote a preemptive war of international aggression to the American people, and they actuated this ruse by low-balling the cost, and by claiming it would be a "cakewalk war". Lindsey was fired for not parroting the party line, but history reveals that the war and long-term military occupation has in fact cost trillions of dollars. And it has had far-reaching collateral consequences by destabilizing the region and contributing to a wider and apparently endless Orwellian war on terror and the provoked growth of terrorist groups. This destabilizing geopolitical strategy is turning out very badly for hundreds of millions of people around the world.

In addition to the firing of Lindsey, Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill was also fired over his cautions concerning tax cuts during a time of costly wars in the Middle East. These firings damningly reveal a deep ethical rot that

undermines our country's purposes. Since these terminations involved slick efforts to sell an extremely costly and unnecessary war, they were abuses of power that ratcheted up the rate at which elite factions of this nation mortgaged the American people under the forgiving eyes of a false god, for the absurd goal of making rich people richer beyond any possible measure of fairness, rational planning, national security, overall happiness and prospects of sustainability. These two terminations violated overarching principles of our Founding Fathers to establish an enduring nation that would be free from despotic abuses of power and would emphasize the general welfare and create a democratic republic in which the people would be fairly represented.

Remember John Steinbeck's observations about "a Congress of honest men" during the early stages of World War II. These men had refused an appropriation of several hundreds of millions of dollars to feed the people because they believed the economic structure of the country would collapse under the pressure of such expenditure. Think about what Steinbeck was saying when he noted, "the same men, just as honestly, are devoting many billions to the manufacture, transportation and detonation of explosives to protect the people they would not feed." And recognize that the great author was referring to honest men. DISHONEST men, on the other hand, are obviously capable of wreaking an even worse toll on the world by being excessively staunch in their dedication to coldly-calculated self-interest and ideology over reason.

In the Senate, Republican Mitch McConnell was so audaciously corrupt that he proudly displayed venomous editorial cartoons on the walls of his Senate office in D.C. that lampoon him for his staunch opposition to campaign finance reform. He did this in spite of the fact that such reforms would give the American people more voice and sensibly limit the amount of influence that wealthy people and big corporations have in dictating our national policies on crucial issues like international trade, jobs, tax rates and the environment.

While most politicians desperately want to be liked, McConnell has relished his reputation as a villain. "After all," as Politico Magazine states, "he achieved his iron-fisted grip on the politics of his home state and his fractious party on Capitol Hill through discipline, cunning and, oftentimes, fear." Tellingly, McConnell was first elected to the Senate in 1984 with the help of a wily political ad produced by archconservative Roger Ailes. The ad scurrilously showed a pack of bloodhounds running around searching for his opponent. That image was once again evocative in 2016 as the internecine Republican contest for the nomination of their party for the presidency gave way to tremendous uncertainty in a calamitous Trumpian triumph. And McConnell has taken to proudly proclaiming himself "the grim reaper" of progressive legislation and honest bipartisan reforms.

For most of Barack Obama's presidency, McConnell was the face of Republican obstructionism. He is a central part of a larger political upheaval as an increasingly ugly civil war has embroiled the Republican Party, pitting its conservative establishment against its more extreme conservative Tea Party and Freedom Caucus insurgency and anti-establishment fervor and twisted demagogic despotic Trumpism. For all too long, right-wing factions have been winning. In prior years, they ousted Republican senators that Mitch McConnell called friends and peers, veterans like Indiana's Richard Lugar and Utah's Bob Bennett -- "rock-ribbed conservatives both", who were not afraid of working with Democrats. Lugar lost a re-election bid in a 2012 primary election in Indiana to whacko Tea Party extremist Richard Mourdock, and this outcome brought the disciplined McConnell to the brink of tears on the Senate floor. "You're a treasure to the Senate and a model of the public servant," an emotional McConnell declared. "We're sorry to see you go, and I'm sorry to lose your wise counsel."

Moderation, not extremism and not hard times swindles, would be much better for the people. "Ditch Mitch!"

> "GOP candidates would be well advised to shift their focus from attacking the poor to going after those who are really dependent upon government -- the Political Class, the crony capitalists, the megabanks and other recipients of corporate welfare."
>
> --- Scott Rasmussen

<u>A Sign from God</u>?

The colossal storm Sandy that struck the East Coast at the end of October 2012 turned out to be one of the most costly natural disasters in history. The epic hurricanes in 2017, and then Hurricane Ian that devastated parts of Florida in September 2022, were likewise very costly. The federal government rushed to help people

whose lives were disrupted by these tragedies, and this role of the government in assisting people who are victims of natural disasters can be seen to be vitally important. Such calamities highlighted the radical nature of conservatives' anti-government convictions. In a presidential primary debate late in 2011, Mitt Romney had said that disaster assistance should be sent back to the states, "and if you can go even further, and send it back to the private sector, that's even better." Really? Such a mindset would be verily preposterous!

It is astonishing that some people hold ideological convictions that blind them so severely that they suppose amoral profit-obsessed private corporations would do a better job than the federal government in helping millions of people who suffered adversities due to colossally violent storms -- or pandemic contagions. Corporations, realistically, would be much more likely *to find cunning ways to cut costs!*

People tend to come together during times of natural disasters, and the first responders who work long hours to help other people and save many lives deserve heartfelt thanks and appreciation.

Poorly considered anti-government ideologies are a threat to the well-being of millions of Americans. If we extrapolate, we see that such doctrines are a threat to the future security of everyone in our nation. The American people would have been served much better if we had created a "rainy day fund" to pay for costs of natural disasters, instead of having made our country more fiscally unstable by indulging in the expediency of running huge budget deficits every year to finance high levels of spending on the military, along with inadequate levels of revenues collected due to historically low tax rates given to persons with the highest incomes.

It is almost as if these powerful storms were signs from God. Superstorm Sandy, after all, suspiciously came just one week before the national elections on November 6, 2012. It is less likely that these were signs from God, rather than actually being signs from Mother Earth telling humanity that we should listen to scientists who tell us there is a global warming effect associated with spewing billions of tons of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere every year. Maybe God was telling us to reject denials by "conservative" politicians about these big risks. Greenhouse gases are causing an unsteady but inexorable increase in average global temperatures, and this warming is causing ominous ecosystem impacts and changes in weather patterns around the planet. The costs of these changes are escalating as hurricanes, tornadoes and other storms become more severe, and as trends develop like worsening heat waves, floods, droughts, crop failures, wildfires and insidiously increasingly coastal flooding caused by rising sea levels and storm surges. Hear these words anew as the melting West Antarctic Ice Sheet continues to disintegrate into the sea.

Apologists for the status quo generally want businesses and individuals to be able to continue their polluting and carbon-emitting activities without being required to pay for remedial measures. They apparently believe it's a good plan to stick taxpayers with the cost of efforts to mitigate the damages that result. We should take a courageous stand against this scheme of allowing costs to be socialized to maximize private profits. The costs of damages caused by extreme weather events should be covered by funds generated from fees on carbon emissions rather than by allowing these costs to be externalized. We are already imposing a long litany of costs and ecological harms and detrimental effects of resource depletion onto people in future generations, so it is outrageous to allow short-term-oriented expediencies to harshly compound these unfolding adversities.

Foreboding changes in weather and precipitation patterns around the world tell us we should begin to heed sensible precautionary principles. A good enunciation of these ideas can be found in *Intelligent Precautionary Principles Enunciated -- Holy Cow!* Our societies would be much healthier, wholesome and holistic if we were to choose to recognize, respect and honor the feminine facets of God, and of our psyches, and of females in our cultures. These aspects of our humanity have been repressed for many millennia by authorities in the world's patriarchal religions, with their judgmental dominant dogmas that perpetuate discrimination, and their rigid interpretations of Scriptures and retrogressive, antediluvian, anti-scientific and markedly sexist worldviews.

<u>Concluding Observations, More or Less</u>

> "The flowering of genius in ancient Greece was due to the immense impetus given when clarity and power of thought was added to great spiritual force."
>
> --- *The Greek Way,* Edith Hamilton

Addressing concerns of individuals and of communities are both vitally important. Fair compromises should be made to assure a wholesome balance between these two often-conflicting sets of concerns. Fair-mindedness contributes to the greater good, the general welfare, and an ethical search for common ground. As Edith Hamilton wrote: "The bitterest conflicts that have divided the minds of men and set family against family, and brother against brother, have been waged for one side of the truth to the suppression of the other side."

Turmoil and dissension envelop our modern world because we cannot figuratively see the forest for the trees, and are thus literally unable to find an equitable balance between the claims of wealthy individuals and claims of the majority. In particular, there is a grave imbalance between the demands of rich people to pay low tax rates and the wide-ranging needs of society to make farsighted investments in education, infrastructure, clean energy, affordable social safety net programs, and environmental protections. Low tax rates for the highest-income earners also make it all but impossible to balance federal budgets. We must find ways to stop financing operations and low taxes through the unfair expediency of borrowing from folks in the future.

Dante Alighieri was cynical about his native Firenze on account of the harsh way it had treated him, so he wrote that Florence was "the embodiment of a society that had lost its way, a society that had sacrificed the good of the community to the interests of powerful individuals: in short, a society which, by obsessively seeking heaven on earth, had made a hell of life on earth." An alarm sounds!

With more modern understandings, we can do better than Florence did 700 years ago when Dante was alive. The social cohesion of more harmonious societal relationships is a positive force, as Joseph Stiglitz makes clear in *The Price of Inequality.* It must necessarily involve striking a better balance between guarantees of personal liberties, a bigger modicum of security for all, and fairer rules of law. A new ethical and spiritual perspective is needed that will provide us with a saner balance in our selfishly shortsighted and materialistic world. And this perspective calls for a Golden Rule commitment to the well-being of others -- and of our descendants.

True justice and injustice are being blurred today in the complex interplay between competing interests. One consequence is that wholly inadequate value has been given to the balance and health of Earth's natural ecosystems. It is astonishingly foolhardy for us to collectively continue encouraging increases in human numbers (especially in developing countries) while stimulating activities that diminish the carrying capacity of Earth's ecosystems to provide for all of humanity. Better ideas on how to remedy these problems are investigated throughout this manifesto. Let's take a stand together to commit our nation to greater fairness to our heirs!

The Dalai Lama made a provocative statement at a Vancouver Peace Summit in 2009: "The world will be saved by the Western woman." Maybe so! Freedom of expression is a powerful thing, and surely there have been many occasions in history when the pen has proved to be mightier than the sword. Eh, Voltaire?

For better illumination, I recommend *A Feminine Vision of an Achievable Better World: Anima Should Reign!* This essay contains valuable understandings about the many ways that sensible feminism and broad-minded empowerment of women and a more honorable valuing of feminine sensibilities of every person could advance greater good causes. And for the hyper political, check out the powerful ideas expressed in *See Clearly: Sanity during Insane Times – Book Twelve of the Earth Manifesto.*

The time has come today for us to collectively stand up, step forward, and revolutionarily make our human societies fairer, healthier, safer, more just, and more sustainable. "Let's roll"!

Truly,
Dr. Tiffany B. Twain
Begun in 2015, updated October 2017, May 2019, July 2020, December 2021 and October 2022

P.S. See the Appendix at the end of the online version of *Uncommon Sense and Fair-Mindedness* for additional somewhat dated but valid observations that are not included in Book One due to space considerations.

A Bill of Rights for Future Generations

Dr. Tiffany B. Twain
May 1. 2023

"Each generation, sharing in the heritage of the Earth, has a duty as trustee for future generations to prevent irreversible and irreparable harm to life on Earth and to human freedom and dignity."

--- Jacques-Yves Cousteau

One galvanizing reason for the creation and articulation of this Bill Rights for Future Generations is to point the way to our becoming better ancestors. How? By contributing whatever ways possible to helping prevent the dooming of our descendents to harsh fates in a depleted, despoiled and dystopian world. Every person plays a role in this, and wealthy people have the biggest responsibility, having potentials for making the most difference.

Congress passed the original Bill of Rights in 1789 to guarantee essential human rights and personal liberties to the American people. This great Bill of Rights consisted of the first Ten Amendments to the Constitution. As stated in the Preamble to this Bill of Rights, former colonists, disgusted with despotism, expressed an insistent protective desire "to prevent misconstruction or abuse" of the powers of the new federal government over its citizens. They clearly recognized the value of extending "the ground of public confidence in the Government", and sought reassurances in these guarantees that our democracy would be directed toward "beneficent ends."

Our Founders gave Congress the power in the Constitution to provide for the "general Welfare". In the long run, the general welfare and the common good are completely dependent on fair institutions, equitable laws, principled social policies, strongly protected basic human rights, wise investments, honest economic accounting, sensible fiscal discipline, resource conservation and commitments to safeguarding the health of the natural environment. These needs can be satisfied in the long run only by a proper framework of respected rights for our descendants in the future. This, propitiously, just happens to coincide with our ultimate moral imperative.

"Freedom is not license but responsibility -- the gift we have received and the legacy we must bequeath. Although our sojourn in life is brief, we are on a great journey. For those who came before us -- and for those who will follow -- our moral, political and religious duty is to make sure that this nation, which was conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all are equal under the law, is in good hands on our watch."

--- The honorable journalist Bill Moyers

People tend to compete ruthlessly to gain advantages. Many interest groups seek a variety of goals in our society, and a lot of them strive to get more perks and benefits from the government. Some groups are exceedingly well represented -- especially rich people and big corporations -- while many millions of people are poorly represented. The interest groups that are most under-represented are young people under the age of 18, because they cannot vote, as well as with every one of the countless multitudes of powerless persons to be born in the future.

"The status quo has many guardians, but the future is an orphan."

--- Timothy Wirth, United Nations Foundation and Better World Fund

This disenfranchisement results in extreme inequities and injustices. It is our ethical obligation to collectively make an overarching commitment to fairer guiding principles in the form of this proposed new Bill of Rights.

This Bill of Rights, once ratified worldwide, would represent a universal declaration of solidarity for making honest efforts to leave a legacy to all persons in the future of reasonable prospects for health, prosperity, security, dignity and a fair quality of life. This Bill of Rights would help prevent damages and disruptions to our home planet's vital biosphere, natural ecosystems and global climate. These reckless threats right now are unconscionably causing numerous species of life to be driven toward eternal extinction. The bell tolls for us all.

The ratification of this new Bill of Rights would demonstrate a vital and necessary commitment to the greater good in the long run. Leaders in nations worldwide would be "paying forward" good deeds through this action. This is how we should improve the prospects of leaving a livable world to our children, and theirs, and theirs, and theirs -- to the Seventh Generation, and beyond. This Bill of Rights could propitiously provide better confidence and trust in our governing institutions -- by succeeding in keeping system-rigging scoundrels in check, along with their influence-abusing puppet masters. People deserve a much more transparent, accountable and trustworthy government, and vastly more honorable integrity in leadership.

The incisive words of progressive Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis must be remembered: "We may have democracy, or we may have wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we cannot have both." Republicans strongly support narrowly concentrated wealth, so under their domineering undemocratic political influence, the USA has become an increasingly inadequately-controlled corporatocracy and plutocracy. This is antithetical to more broadly shared well-being, and it is consequentially contrary to the common good in the long run.

Today, let us be mindful of the fact that the well-being of all people in the future is seriously threatened by extremely short term oriented activities and present-day expediencies, and by excessive consumerism and the rashly unsustainable and profligate greed-driven exploitation of natural resources.

Let us eat the fruit of one of those sublime Trees of the Awareness of Right and Wrong, and let's share it universally, and acknowledge together that the ultimate moral good is to leave a fairer legacy to all people in the future than current trends portend -- and better conditions than current policies and priorities make probable.

As Victor Hugo once wrote, "Nothing is more powerful than an idea whose time has come."

PROPOSED BILL OF RIGHTS FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS:

Article 1. Sustainable Resource Use

Enact an Ecological Sanity Initiative that includes powerful incentives and smart green fees that would be effective in encouraging a cleaner energy regime and the conservation of resources, healthier forests, reduced reliance on non-renewable resources, good protections of Clean Air and fresh water supplies, regenerative agriculture, sustainable fisheries, the preservation of biological diversity, restorative urban renewal and beneficial protections of open spaces, National Parks and Forests, Bureau of Land Management lands, wildlife preserves, free-flowing rivers and wilderness areas. This Initiative should give priority to safeguarding the health of natural ecosystems and the crucially valuable services they provide to humanity. This goal would best be achieved by investing in stronger protections of public lands, forests, wetlands, coral reef communities, marine sanctuaries and other wildlife habitats, and by striving to restore the resilience and symbiosis inherent in healthy biological diversity.

> "The nation behaves well if it treats its natural resources as assets which it must turn over to the next generation increased, and not impaired, in value."
>
> --- Theodore Roosevelt

Conservatives should naturally ally themselves with those who champion resource conservation. Instead, these folks detrimentally tend to be looking backwards and throwing their lot in with corporate entities and right-wing authoritarian politicians whose top priority is to gain narrow advantages for themselves while imposing austerity and more oppressive control over others. To achieve these goals, they are treacherously willing to deny scientific facts and act in ways certain to be harmful to people in the future, and to evade individual responsibility for their negative impacts and the broadly harmful influence of their overly greedy and self-serving agendas.

"Whatever happens to the Earth, happens to the children of the Earth … All things are connected, like the blood that unites one family. Mankind did not weave the web of life; we are but one strand within it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves."

--- Attributed to Chief Seattle in 1844, in a warning against the misuse of land, water, air and animal life.

This Ecological Sanity Initiative would salubriously have 12 primary provisions, as enumerated in *Three Bills of Right: A Triumvirate of Responsible Actions for the Greater Good.* See that essay in the Earth Manifesto online, or in *Healthy Recipes and Provocative Worldviews – Book Five of the Earth Manifesto.*

Article 2. Prevention of Excessive Anthropogenic Climate Disruption

Levy a cost on carbon to deal with the adverse impacts of global warming caused by greenhouse gas emissions, and of related changes in weather patterns, storm intensity and extremes of temperatures and precipitation. Create a progressive plan by making the higher costs associated with this assessment fully offset for everyone in the bottom half of income earners. And use funds generated by this plan for two purposes: first, to create a "rainy day fund" that covers the costs of natural disasters being caused by extreme weather events, including more powerful hurricanes, floods, droughts, destructive wildfires, heat waves, winter storms, ocean acidification and rising sea levels; and second, to provide generous financing for the incipient and necessary 'green transition' to a cleaner and more renewable energy future.

Remember: "If we fail to act now, it is scientifically irrefutable that there will be catastrophic and irreversible consequences for humanity and the planet." Donald Trump knew this in 2009 when he attested to it by signing on with 100 prominent business leaders to a full-page ad in the New York Times that urged bold and responsible climate action at a then soon-to-take-place Copenhagen Climate Conference in December 2009. Denial of this understanding is proving disastrous, and unconscionably costly.

This ad contained an existential plea: Lead the world by example "to ensure meaningful and effective measures to control climate change, an immediate challenge facing the United States and the world today." Let's do it!

Article 3. Pollution Control and Mitigation

Require corporations that pollute rivers, lakes, oceans and the atmosphere to pay for prevention and mitigation measures to offset the harmful impacts caused by their polluting activities. These costs should be included in prices of all products and services, rather than being allowed to be externalized onto the public and persons in the future. Strong steps should furthermore be taken to ensure that big corporations and governments adhere to precautionary principles that require cost-effective measures to be implemented to prevent the degradation of the environmental commons.

"As people alive today, we must consider future generations. A clean environment is a human right like any other. It is therefore part of our responsibility toward others to ensure that the world we pass on is as healthy, if not healthier, than we found it."

--- The Dalai Lama

Article 4. Peaceful Coexistence

Strengthen international institutions to build peace between nations, and to prevent violent conflicts between countries. Finance this effort to minimize wars by levying a surcharge on all U.S. sales of arms abroad. Target this surcharge to raise a total $100 billion per year. Also, seek to ratify nuclear arms control agreements with other nations, and dial down belligerence toward other countries like North Korea and Iran. At home, every American should seek to join a consensus in helping solve far-reaching injustices and other challenges we face.

Article 5. Sensible Family Planning and Women's Reproductive Healthcare

Significantly increase funding at home and abroad for women's healthcare clinics, family planning services, AIDS prevention, and free contraceptives for all women and men who want them. Strongly support sex education programs that are truly comprehensive, and make sure they are medically accurate and socially sensible so that they will be successful in preventing sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies.

Honor the primacy of ORIGINAL CHOICE. Long ago, after thousands of generations of evolution, a realization dawned on females that there is a direct correlation between a sex act with a specific male and the birth of a baby 9 moons later. This awareness altered instinctive drives, and motivated females to become much choosier about what male they would accept as a mate. Dr. Leonard Shlain labeled this biological prerogative "Original Choice" in his fascinating book *Sex, Time, and Power: How Women's Sexuality Shaped Human Evolution.*

This Original Choice cannot now be overridden by authority-abusing social conservatives who want to deprive women of any right to get a safe and legal abortion, outrageously even when the pregnancy resulted from rape or incest. Such hubristic prohibitions deprive females of agency over their lives and their destinies.

See that the 1973 *Roe vs. Wade* ruling made by the U.S. Supreme Court was an eminently reasonable decision that established a fair balance between the natural rights of females to exert a measure of control in their own lives and an implied right of a fertilized egg and incipient clump of cells to be nurtured until it becomes viable. The revolution wrought by the birth control pill in the 1960s, and the morning-after pill, altered the "dance of selves in relationship", causing women's liberation movements to blossom. Social reactionaries cannot now be allowed to turn back time and ruthlessly impose the hegemony of their oppressive control and false moralities on females. The *Roe vs. Wade* decision should be codified into law through legislation such as the Women's Health Protection Act that was passed by the House in September 2021, despite intransigent Republican opposition.

By the end of their childbearing years, something like one out of every seven U.S. women in current times will have never had any children. Think about these women! A good portion of them freely choose not to ever reproduce, so it is particularly offensive to have dogmatic "be fruitful and multiply" Bible believers and social "conservatives" come along and conspire to force women to have children they do not want. This is wrong!

Making matters worse, conservative politicians have used this emotion-hijacking hot button issue to galvanize zealous support from anti-choice voters, especially in Southern states like Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Florida and Georgia. And they have pathologically parlayed this Trojan Horse subterfuge into shrewd rationalizations for structural gender discrimination, flagrant abuses of power, concerted efforts to undermine democratic fairness, a harsh war on the poor, wealth concentrating scams, cost externalizing schemes, scandalously corrupt governance, initiatives to mortgage the future by enacting regressive tax cuts that mostly benefit the well-to-do, and efforts to make ominously consequential justifications for sacrificing the environment and the biosphere on the altar of exploitive greed and profligacy.

Aretha Franklin soulfully sang out, "R-E-S-P-E-C-T, Find out what it means to me!" Find out -- See the coherent Rationalizing Reasoning below, which follows my Conclusion.

Article 6. <u>Social, Environmental and Intergenerational Justice</u>

Increase the fairness of economic opportunity and security for all people by creating a more level playing field in our currently winner-take-all societies. This would have a collateral benefit of reducing desperation, crime and the costs of mass incarceration. Also, improve environmental justice to assure that the disadvantaged poor do not bear such undue burdens of exposure to toxic wastes, air pollution, environmental damages and "natural disasters" that are made worse by climate change. Provide fairer treatment and generous foreign aid to people in developing countries around the world to mitigate damages caused by excessive profiteering by giant corporate entities. And enact policies that are much fairer to all those in younger generations.

Article 7. <u>Stabilization of the National Debt</u>

Prevent the federal government from using deficit spending to excessively obligate every taxpayer in the future for today's expediencies. People today should not be allowed to saddle future generations with high interest cost obligations on rapidly accumulating sums of borrowed money spent for dubious purposes. This goal should be accomplished by establishing an effective mechanism that reduces the U.S. national debt to less than 100% of annual GDP, as it had been from a few years after the end of World War II until recently. Such a proposal is outlined in a Balanced Budget Initiative proposed in *One Dozen Big Initiatives to Positively Transform Our Societies.* This initiative would have a compelling influence on the primary drivers of our national policies -- rich people and giant corporations -- by pressuring them to SEEK COMMON CAUSE with the

American people, rather than being stubbornly opposed to equitable and sensible solutions to our daunting budgetary challenges. More steeply graduated tax rates and a wealth tax would be broadly advantageous, so they should be evaluated and put in place.

A significantly positive impact could also be achieved by implementing the proposals made in *Radically Simple Ways to Make America Fairer, and to Fix Both Social Security and Health Care So We Can Move On to Address Much Bigger Issues.* These proposals contain detailed plans on how we can help solve our tax, budget deficit, Social Security and healthcare challenges.

Conclusion

We should rightly ratify this Bill of Rights for Future Generations -- in the USA and in countries worldwide -- to protect the interests of those in the future from need-driven and mindlessly materialistic and irresponsibly greed-driven consumerism and status-seeking conspicuous consumption. See clearly that the bottom line drive that is so perverting our national policies and priorities is an excessive compulsion to get money, social status and power.

Look, here's the deal. We Americans supposedly have the right to choose good governance that represents government "of the people, by the people and for the people." We should demand that the leaders we choose genuinely represent the vast majority of us, and demonstrate greater concern for the general welfare and liberty and justice for all. Let's act to make ours a nation united, indivisible, rather than one whose citizens are divided against each other by cunning master manipulators who exploit grievances, resentments and antagonisms and take ruthless advantage of people and circumstances for their own personal gain.

Social cohesion is a public good, and the surest path for creating unifying bonds is by ensuring that prosperity is more broadly shared. The sad nature of the corrupt status quo is proof that our representatives care more about their own ambitions and wealth than the public good. Elections have major consequences, and we should surely choose more wisely! Citizens should be alert to scams, swindles, deceit, public graft and foreign intrigue treachery. The time has come for us to make a radical rededication to common good values, and have it be informed by strong commitments to this new Bill of Rights.

Thomas Paine valued freedom and despised oppression above all, and he noted of his times in revolutionary colonial days, "THESE are the times that try men's souls." He laudably added, "We have it in our power to begin the world over again." Let's just do it!

Truly,
Dr. Tiffany B. Twain www.EarthManifesto.com

Rationalizing Reasoning

An admirable eminence in conservation is the primatologist and anthropologist Jane Goodall, who once shared this simple visionary insight: "There's a saying, 'We haven't inherited this planet from our parents, we've borrowed it from our children.' When you borrow, you plan to pay back. We've been stealing and stealing and stealing. And it's about time we got together and started paying back."

Bill Moyers' cogent words again resonate in the interstices of my mind. Moyers noted soon after 9/11 that when he reads the news about all the things humanity is doing in the world, he concludes it's not as if "Father, forgive us, for we know not what we do." He thought as he looked at photos on his desk of his five grandchildren: "We do know what we are doing. We are stealing their future. Betraying their trust. Despoiling their world."

Pope Benedict XVI expressed his conviction clearly in *Light of the World,* "We are living at the expense of future generations. In this respect, it is plain that we are living in untruth."

Many people pay close attention to leading economic indicators. These are, misfortunately, lagging indicators that distort measures of what is really most providentially propitious for sustainable existence and future general well-being. It is our overarching obligation to be good ancestors, and treat our heirs considerately, responsibly and caringly by paying forward a considerable respect for the Golden Rule reciprocity principle, doing unto our descendents as we surely would have wanted them to have done a better job of doing unto us.

Sir David Attenborough, renowned naturalist and natural historian, has produced an extraordinary documentary film *A Life on Our Planet* that serves as his "witness statement" to the far-reaching changes that have taken place in his 93 years alive. In this must-see film, Attenborough makes vividly clear the basic existential reasons for his concerns about the increasingly grave consequences of human impacts on habitats and ecosystems, and he importantly issues a hope-inspired clarion call for remedial action. Wisdom is required, he says. And surely, we cannot continue to be guided by irresponsible scheming and shrewd calculations of the rich, and materialistic consumerism and short term-oriented profit-obsessed zeal for exploiting and liquidating natural assets.

In defiance of Sir David's clear-eyed crucial understanding, "a vast right-wing cabal" of super-rich Big Money interests bought domineering control of the White House and federal government agencies with the Trump administration, along with the U.S. Senate, the Supreme Court and more than half of state legislatures and governorships and attorney general positions. They did this despite not having support from a majority of the people. Vote for candidates in all future elections who will honestly make efforts to change this sorry state!

Let's respect and appreciate Rachel Carson's deathbed appeal in 1964 to next generations. "A great deal of our onslaught on Mother Nature is not really lack of intelligence but a lack of compassion for future generations and the health of the planet: sheer selfish greed for short-term benefits to increase the wealth and power of individuals, corporations, and governments. The rest is due to thoughtlessness, lack of education, and poverty. In other words, there seems to be a disconnect between our clever brain and our compassionate heart. True wisdom requires both thinking with our head and understanding with our heart." Perhaps love is the answer?!

Poet Robert Frost famously took the path less traveled by, when he came to a juncture where paths diverged in a woods. Let's all salute poetic justice and join like-minded responsible folks who favor drastically different courses of action than those that are being imposed on the populace under excessive influence by wealthy conservatives and corporate profiteers and their treacherously obedient MAGA Republican politician lackeys.

The 2020 elections were one of the last best chances for the majority of the American people to begin "to save the world" by taking back control of the rudder of the ship of state from unprincipled conservatives and the reactionary Religious Right, and emotion-manipulating media outlets like Fox News, conservative talk radio and the extreme alt-right. There is a profound truth in Thomas Paine's incisive observation, "A body of men holding themselves accountable to nobody ought not to be trusted by anybody."

Conservative judges and Supreme Court Justices strive mightily to set forth what economist John Kenneth Galbraith called "one of man's oldest exercises in moral philosophy; that is, the search for a superior moral justification for selfishness." They have become reactionary purveyors of ideological interpretations of the U.S. Constitution that give the super-rich and far-right partisans and corporate entities -- and religious conservatives -- excessive rights and power over real people and their destinies.

In Ancient Greece, people believed in Nemesis, a Goddess of Divine Retribution that was regarded as meting out implacable justice against those who display hubris. Recognizing the arrogance of influence peddling Republicans and their wealthy puppet masters, we must demand that they relent in their onerous abuses of power.

Alert here now! A climate crisis is unfolding that is also a serious health crisis -- from the cataclysmic impacts of worsening natural disasters on hard-hit communities to proliferating diseases and the role of air pollution in rising cancer rates around the globe. In a sensational instance of surprising timing, after 18 months of the worst global pandemic in more than a century, 230 of the world's largest medical journals united and authored a joint letter in September 2021 declaring the climate crisis to be the biggest threat to public health of our lifetimes. The medical journals warned that the warming climate is the "greatest threat" to global public health. This unprecedented joint statement urged world leaders to cut heat-trapping emissions to avoid "catastrophic harm to health that will be impossible to reverse." Otherwise, we risk creating conditions like what David Wallace-Wells basically describes ominously in his book, *The Uninhabitable Earth.*

The editorial letter, published in leading journals such as *The Lancet* and *The New England Journal of Medicine,* said the world can't wait for the COVID-19 pandemic to pass before addressing climate change. It said, "No temperature rise is 'safe. In the past 20 years, heat-related mortality among people over 65 years of age has

increased by more than 50%."

Beating back the threat of the climate crisis demands fundamental changes to societies and economies worldwide — not just a simple swap of dirty technologies for cleaner ones. "Governments need to treat the climate crisis with the same urgency as COVID-19, committing massive investments toward the redesign of cities, transportation networks, food systems, health care, and more."

There is a powerful convincing overriding good reason why we must heed increasingly dire "code red" warnings about climate change -- and why we must take unprecedented remedial action through concerted national and international efforts to stave off climate change. This is because of tipping points. According to the UN, we're rapidly approaching several tipping point thresholds for our planet after which damage will accelerate even further and become irreversible.

Here is one really inconvenient truth: a feedback loop materialized in real time as devastating wildfires caused record-high emissions of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere in the Northern Hemisphere in 2021. "The number of fires, the size of the areas they burned, and their intensity and diligence as blazes" converted wood into burned carbon at the highest rate ever recorded in July and August, according to a report by Copernicus, the European Earth Observatory. Global warming trends "increase the frequency of wildfires, which in turn increases the amount of carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere from burning trees, which leads to an increase in global temperature, which means, you guessed it, even more wildfires."

One temporary solution to the increasing amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere would be to remove this greenhouse gas from the atmosphere by planting billions of trees that would remove carbon through the process of photosynthesis. Unfortunately, one outcome of a warming climate is that hotter weather and a destabilized climate is producing drier conditions in many locales -- and worse wildfires. So this solution could go up in smoke.

In the sensational article *'Tipping points' in Earth's system triggered rapid climate change 55 million years ago, research shows,* it is disclosed that scientists have identified seven climate tipping points that could change the world forever. Various elements of the Earth system are at risk of reaching points of no return. "These elements broadly fall into three categories -- ice, sea, and land -- and range from the melting of permafrost and the Greenland ice sheet to the death of coral reefs to the raging of more and more wildfires."

These things are tragically only a preview of much worse changes to come, "and they are coming fast", as David Wallace-Wells puts it in *The Uninhabitable Earth: Life After Warming.* "Without a revolution in how billions of humans conduct their lives, parts of the Earth could become close to uninhabitable, and other parts horrifically inhospitable, as soon as the end of this century."

Consider the reckless Trumpian ruse of going rogue against humanity on the existential issue of human-caused climate change. Look specifically at the Paris Climate Accords. These are the most widely supported agreements in world history. They are a first step, albeit inadequate, towards trying to mitigate the most dire harbinger of future hard times that is found in anthropogenic climate disrupting activities.

In a climate change question at the Vice Presidential debate with Kamala Harris in 2020, Mike Pence doubled down on rigidifying the Trump Discords, in effect declaring that America First is *über alles* -- and that it is what some say is our "asshole government's absolute right" to reject our ultimate moral responsibility to try to mitigate the extreme social and environmental injustices that climate change is causing in the world today.

> "Behold my brothers, the Spring has come; the earth has received the embraces of the sun and we shall soon see the results of that love! Every seed is awakened and so has all animal life. It is through this mysterious power that we too have our being, and we therefore yield to our neighbors, even our animal neighbors, the same right as ourselves, to inhabit this land. Yet, hear me, people, we have now to deal with another race -- small and feeble when our fathers first met them, but now great and overbearing. Strangely enough they have a mind to till the soil and the love of possession is a disease with them. These people have made many rules that the rich may break but the poor may not. They take their tithes from the poor and weak to support the rich and those who rule. They claim this mother of ours, the earth, for their own and fence

their neighbors away; they deface her with their buildings and refuse. The nation is like a spring freshet that overruns its banks and destroys all that are in its path."

--- Sitting Bull, a Lakota Sioux Chief, 1877

For visionary good guidance, the enactment of a Bill of Rights for Future Generations will help ensure that each and every year we invest in the common good rather than letting rich people hubristically continue to get away with their rigged tax evasion schemes and Tax Cut swindles. The current status quo has allowed the nearly 650 billionaires in the USA to enjoy a wealth increase of about $1.3 trillion -- or something like 40% -- in the 18 months from mid-March 2020 through September 2021, according to the 40th annual Forbes 400 list of the wealthiest Americans.

Ponder this. "America's nearly 650 billionaires now have more than twice as much wealth as the bottom half of the population -- 165 million people." And, according to Forbes rankings, the 400 richest Americans have as much combined wealth as the poorest 64% of American households. Highlighting the dastardly consequentiality of the economic rigging that has helped create this state of affairs, the national debt has increased by something like $8 trillion since the pandemic began in early 2020, at a time that 50 million people temporarily lost their jobs, millions went hungry, and 12 million lost their employer-provided health insurance. This, during a period in which tens of millions of Americans were infected by the contagious coronavirus, and over one million have died, many unnecessarily, due to the treacherously manipulative deceitful irresponsible divide-to-conquer shenanigans involved in Republican politicizing of science, mask wearing, social distancing and getting vaccinated.

Back in October 2020, the Federal Reserve released data that showed rapidly increasingly stark disparities in U.S. wealth by race, age and class. The numbers cast a laser-like light on the structural systemic injustices that are so bad that white Americans hold 84% of the nation's wealth, while Black households have only 4%. Shame on all who stand athwart progressive plans for ameliorating these adversity-engendering real world conditions. The Fed data revealed that the top 1% of Americans have a combined net worth of over $34 trillion, while the poorest 50% hold only a little over $2 trillion of all household wealth.

An ethical rot lies at the core of the swamp monster culture of corruption in Washington D.C. This violation of ethics and moral rectitude is a main causative factor in perpetuating this grotesque degree of inequality and injustice in the land of the supposedly free.

COVID-19 exacerbated inequality in the U.S., because job losses fell heavily on low-wage service workers, and the virus disproportionately infected and killed people of color. Meanwhile, many professionals in the upper-middle class are working from home, and watching their equities rise in value in response to the U.S. Treasury and Federal Reserve pumping record amounts of stimulus into businesses, the economy and markets.

And the Trump administration pushed to get the partisan "conservatives" on the Supreme Court to take a stand for the rich against everyone else by declaring the Affordable Care Act unconstitutional because it assessed a 3.8% tax on their Net Investment Incomes in order to pay for expanded healthcare that has helped tens of millions of Americans. Lobbyists for the rich and big insurance companies hate restrictions on their freedom to increase profits, like by having their ability limited to discriminate against those with preexisting conditions.

"One commonsense reform to the tax code would be to enact a wealth tax, which would annually tax the net worth of the super-rich. It would be similar to the taxes on real estate and (in some places) personal property like luxury automobiles." A wealth tax could raise more than $2 trillion annually, and only the wealthiest 0.1% -- or 75,000 households -- would be subject to the tax. A vote on this issue would rightly be 99.9% to .1%.

"Once the super-rich start paying their fair share in taxes, we could dedicate more funds to critical services for struggling families and vulnerable people, including making sure people have food, housing and health care." And we could do critical work of strengthening the social safety net, investing in better infrastructure, and protecting the environment -- and achieving so many other socially desirable objectives.

A wealth tax would help address the extreme inequities that allow rich people like Trump and his family and "friends" and co-conspiratorial enablers to pay little or no taxes. Look at Trump's record on paying taxes. The *New York Times* made explosive revelations that he paid no federal income taxes in 11 out of 18 years, and

paid just $750 in 2016 and 2017. This shows that Trump skirted tax law, and likely broke it, through improper deductions and other accounting maneuvers. It also makes clear out that it would be a positive plan to make America fairer by requiring rich people to contribute more to making our country more broadly prosperous.

Another reason that millionaires and billionaires can get away with paying zero dollars in income tax is because the enforcement capabilities of the IRS have been severely weakened by Republicans in Congress. "Nine years ago, 12% of millionaires' tax returns were audited. Now, it's just 3%. Remarkably, the very poorest taxpayers -- those eligible for the poverty-fighting Earned Income Tax Credit -- are about as likely to get audited as the wealthiest 1%." Demand that Congress fully fund the IRS to hold tax cheats like Donald Trump accountable.

Republicans arrogantly abused power from 2017 through 2021 by stacking federal courts with conservatives who are biased against mainstream views that favor stronger voting rights, affordable healthcare, a woman's right to choose, better treatment of workers, gun safety, equitable human rights, and real power to the people rather than to corporate entities and other moneyed interests. Immediately after the greatly respectable Ruth Bader Ginsburg died, these diabolically scheming politicians seized the opportunity to ram through another far right partisan onto the Supreme Court, in an all-fired hurry to stack the court in anticipation of electoral fireworks and achieving narrow partisan goals just before the November 2020 elections.

It is diabolically wrong to stack federal courts and the Supreme Court with ideologically extreme judges who rationalize system-corrupting Big Money in our elections and the evisceration of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, thereby letting state legislatures engage in suppressing millions of people's voices. This anti-democratic action is profoundly wrong due to the harmful impacts such partisan rigging has on our governance and policy priorities.

Big Money in politics is a critically important problem. It is not merely a partisan political issue, for it directly affects people's day-to-day lives. In other words, it isn't just an arcane policy issue, it is an issue involving good governance and democratic fair representation, and has consequential impacts on decision making. MOVE TO AMEND! We need strong and smart leadership, not chaotic bad management, pathological deceit, and denials of facts, science, reality and truth. We must take steps to dramatically strengthen our democracy by passing federal voting rights protections like those in the For the People Act or the proposed Freedom to Vote Act, a bill introduced by U.S. senators to protect access to the ballot and get big money out of politics, and ensure fair representation to all, regardless of race or what neighborhood people live in. In addition, a deep dive into the nature of the Electoral College, and undemocratic outcomes associated with it, makes it desirable that we get rid of it to fairly move to the direct popular election of presidents.

The hubristic Republican goal of replacing the laudably liberal-minded Ruth Bader Ginsburg with a religious absolutist and partisan conservative was a rude affront to Ruth Bader Ginsburg's great legacy of having strived to achieve fairer dealings for women in our overly male-dominated patriarchal society. Not only was this raw abuse of power a gross violation of the great liberty-strengthening principle of a strong separation of church and state, but it is also anathema to true democratic fairness and good governance.

Trump's appointee, Amy Coney Barrett, is a staunch Catholic, and a favorite of both the religious right and the far right Federalist Society. This choice is one more huge plank in the eye of the insidious Republican effort to consolidate their grip on power through the courts, instead of making honest, responsible and honorable efforts to gain a popular majority by siding with the majority in promoting the greater good. "More and more, they are faced with a choice between THEIR power and OUR democracy — and they're making their choice clear." They apparently don't give a damn about democratic fairness or the general welfare, or helping facilitate "domestic tranquility".

It was consequentially wrong to have replaced the greatest champion in American history of fairer treatment of women with an orthodox ultra conservative defender of white male supremacy. Far from mainstream views, conservative women like Amy Coney Barrett are traitors to their sex and humanity when they ally themselves with fundamentalist male authorities in a conservative hierarchy that perpetuates the oppressive subordination of females in the name of a stodgy old Church and a jealous, judgmental, unjust, misogynistic, homophobic, capricious and vindictive 'Strict Father' male God -- created in their own image!

Women should not be treated as pawns in culture wars, and never as handmaids forced into child-bearing slavery in a theocratic society like that depicted in the dystopian novel *The Handmaid's Tale.* For this reason, religious fundamentalists deserve the ridicule Mark Twain directed at them in *Letters from the Earth*, in which he wryly lampooned religious dogmas for their preposterous claims, and made a merited critique of the Christian bible with the observation, "It is full of interest. It has noble poetry in it; and some clever fables; and some blood-drenched history; and some good morals; and a wealth of obscenity; and upwards of a thousand lies."

Mark Twain emulated the great Voltaire by using wit, satire and ridicule to throw a bright light onto the follies, absurdities and injustices embedded in established governments, societal hierarchies and reigning power structures. He lampooned both overweening government and religious authorities, and dished out cyclones of laughter with a goal of inspiring societal change and a needed remodeling in the face of established inequities.

I was recently perched on a hillside with a commanding view of San Quentin prison, and felt fortunate to be able to enjoy the relative freedom of those outside the fortress walls, as opposed to the complete lack of freedom within. Mass incarceration is only one aspect of the multitude of sins involved in the domineering status quo, with its structural racism, white male supremacy and sexism. Let's make sure to see clearly right now.

Democracy is obviously better for the people than despotic authoritarian rule. And the slope is slippery, and getting very steep as the Trump tenure in office is morphing into a treacherous attempt to poison future elections by deceiving MAGA supporters and pushing the big lie about the 2020 election having been stolen. Trump's loss and desperate lies and his failure to win any of his many post-election lawsuits are revealing -- as is the treachery of the January 6 insurrection he incited. Preventing a resurgence of Trump and his loyalists is crucial for ensuring greater fairness, responsibility and environmental sanity.

DEDICATION

The idea for this Bill of Rights for Future Generations recognizes the vital inspiration of Eleanor Roosevelt, a champion of human rights who spearheaded the effort by the United Nations' Human Rights Commission to enact the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, in the aftermath of the Second World War. Eleanor Roosevelt called this Declaration the "International Magna Carta for all mankind". The Bill of Rights for Future Generations would eminently equitably expand this respect for natural human rights to all people in the future.

This *Bill of Rights for Future Generations* is dedicated to both Eleanor Roosevelt and to one of the most perceptive and visionary persons I've ever met, a man who died tragically of a sudden heart failure a few years ago at the age of 49. He was a remarkable person who was boyish at heart and yet exceptionally aware, intelligent, energetic and gregarious. He greeted his friends and acquaintances alike with an enthusiastic hug, and conversed with them passionately about important causes and ecologically sane ideas, and he was commendably committed to making the world greener and more sustainable.

"Whatever you think or dream you can do, begin it.
Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it."

--- Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Intelligent Precautionary Principles Enunciated – Holy Cow!

An Earth Manifesto publication by Dr. Tiffany B. Twain
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I. Introduction

We human beings are evolutionarily adapted to be social animals. This is our true human nature. The survival of thousands of generations of our hunter-gatherer ancestors depended on cooperation between males and females, and between members within clan groups. Our ancestors depended on cooperation and group cohesion much more than on ruthlessness in competition or aggressive selfish individualism.

Natural selection honed human beings to be disposed to share food, shelter and child-rearing duties with other members of the groups in which they lived. Social misfits and freeloaders and pugnacious non-conformists were likely ostracized or banished, along with those who were unwilling to help provide for the greater security of the group or abide by communal rules for things like cave hygiene and waste disposal. Conflicts within clans diminished the prospects of being successful for all clan members in their common evolutionary goal of surviving to pass their genes on to offspring in future generations.

With the advent of the Agricultural Revolution, the size of in-groups expanded and they became more focused on extended families and their agrarian communities. In essence, as the civilizing influences of living in ever larger communities increased, human groups became more "domesticated" and civilized, and behaviors consistent with Golden Rule reciprocity came to be more important and providentially adaptive.

In modern times, sink-or-swim Social Darwinism became fashionable among elites, who gained most of the wealth generated by the Industrial Revolution, and on-your-own economic ideologies gained strength. But the main current of our social success as a species resides in reining in those with excessively greedy or violent impulses in order to ensure that the groups to which we belong survive and achieve an adequate degree of well-being.

Today, another revolution is underway, and those who survive will likely be the ones who are smart enough and committed enough to the societies in which they live to champion greater good goals. Our social groups have grown in size to encompass towns, cities and nations, and the entire human race, so our collective survival depends on more collaborative problem solving and a greater commitment to revolutionarily transforming our modes of living to ensure they become sustainable.

The realization is growing that we are all intricately and inextricably interconnected and interdependent. Greed, selfishness, and anti-social inclinations to forsake making contributions to the greater good will prove to be dead ends in evolutionary terms. The foresight essential to farsighted precautionary principles will be vital for the long-term survival of our species. I encourage readers to consider the ideas found in *Revelations of a Modern Prophet* for a more expansive insight into such ideas.

Lessons of history tell us we would be wise to make greater collective commitments to civilizing influences. We should find ways to encourage impulse control, improve long-term planning, and become more honestly sensitive to the feelings and fates of others. Win/lose ethics of ruthless competition, exploitation and obedience to domineering authority must give way to win/win ethics of reciprocity, collaborative problem-solving, recognition of real consequences, and commitments to fairer outcomes.

"We are all in this together", so win/win solutions are the most advantageous ones. Such solutions equitably include the negative motivation of experiencing lose/lose outcomes if cooperative efforts fail. Win/win and lose/lose situations are preferable to win/lose situations because they provide more powerful motives to strive together to achieve common purposes, rather than to work against each other. Win/lose strategies tend to poison relations between people, causing harm-engendering conflicts. Life can be a "non-zero-sum game" in which cooperative initiatives like precautionary planning, sensible divisions of labor, fairness in international trade, and the farsighted sharing of technological advances are better for all.

Intelligence is the most adaptive of all human characteristics. This includes social intelligence and emotional intelligence and ecological intelligence. Critical thinking, clarity of reason and broad scientific understandings of reality are important to our flourishing. Philosophers who advocate rational humanism recognize an implicit social contract in which all people agree to reasonable limits on individual liberties in order to help ensure greater well-being and mutual security. This is an aspect of community ethics that does not rely on religious authority, doctrinal revelation, God-defined morality, or any other claimed certainty that fancies itself being impervious to debate.

Rational humanism is a philosophical perspective that encourages us to be open-minded to learning about the natural world and our true place within it. It is a philosophy that provides us with a natural basis for morality, and for making effective efforts to improve the living conditions and prospects of our kind. Let Lady Philosophy give us consolation -- and come to our aid!

> "Courage stands halfway between cowardice and rashness, one of which is a lack, the other an excess of courage."
>
> --- The Greek historian Plutarch, in the first century CE

The very future of hope and well-being lies in broad-mindedness, intelligent foresight, reasonable risk-taking and wise planning. The need for clarity of understanding, along with honesty, is crucial for achieving truer justice, mutual security, a greater modicum of social equity, and peaceful resolutions of conflicts. We need to act with greater fiscal responsibility, and make our collective activities much more likely to be indefinitely sustainable. We need the courage to stand up for smarter social policies that are more empathetic and more responsible to others -- especially including our descendants. Ecological sanity necessarily includes commitments to caring about future generations, so they are an ultimate moral imperative.

This is not mere moralizing. Surely, socially and ecologically intelligent precautionary principles are vital to our collective survival and prospering. The proposed Bill of Rights for Future Generations in this manifesto should be ratified in nations worldwide so that it would provide overarching guidance toward aggregate actions that are more sustainable. It is not just a value judgment to say that we should more thoroughly understand and honor the underlying principles of sustainable existence.

Our growing appreciation of the extent to which we are interconnected with other human beings, and with the wider web of life on Earth, is creating a more ecological sense of self. This "greener" sense of self is one we need to embrace for its adaptive value. This wider construct of self-identity and self-interest is one that is smart and adaptive, not merely noble, altruistic or virtuous.

A wider and deeper notion of our "selves" naturally includes concerns for the greater good and our common interest in protecting natural ecosystems. The integration of such awareness into all of our worldviews actually serves to protect the self of each and every one of us.

> "The crisis that threatens our planet, whether seen from its military, ecological or social aspect, derives from a dysfunctional and pathological notion of the self. It derives from a mistake about our place in the order of things. It is a delusion that the self is so separate and fragile that we must delineate and defend its boundaries, that it is so small and so needy that we must endlessly acquire and endlessly consume, and that it is so aloof that as individuals, corporations, nation-states or species, we can be immune to what we do to other beings."
>
> --- Joanna Macy, *The Greening of the Self*

II. Ecological Precautionary Principles

> "In all things of nature, there is something of the marvelous."
>
> --- Aristotle

The need to respect ecological precautionary principles is the most important idea in this manifesto. Such principles are inextricably influenced by social, economic, financial and political activities, so precautionary principles in these arenas are also important.

An ecological precautionary principle was enunciated in Principle 15 of the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development. This visionary principle states: "In order to protect the environment, the precautionary approach shall be widely applied by States according to their capabilities. Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, a lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation."

This reasonable "no regrets" approach to environmental policy-making sensibly takes into account the likely impacts on people in future years of our resource-depleting and habitat-damaging activities. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure! This approach helps us focus on actions that should be undertaken to be consistent with values of sensibly protecting ecosystems, and of reasonably sharing prosperity, and of achieving other greater good goals. We are collectively engaged in *Years of Living Dangerously,* so NOW is the time to begin to moderate these risks. David Roberts provides a deeper context for this challenge when he observes: "Humanity has never before had to grapple with a problem that measures itself in centuries, and threatens our very existence, and requires global cooperation to overcome."

Edward O. Wilson, referring to the valuable book *Common Wealth: Economics for a Crowded Planet* by Professor Jeffrey Sachs, noted: "The world has changed radically in the past several decades; it is going to change more, and faster and faster. In spite of all we have accomplished through science and technology -- indeed because of it -- we will soon run out of margin. Now is the time to grasp exactly what is happening. The evidence is compelling: we need to redesign our social and economic policies before we wreck the planet."

Wilson goes on to say that we have a narrow window of opportunity to choose sustainable avenues into the future. If we fail to grasp these opportunities and continue to create intense conflicts and crises, we will catastrophically deplete the cornucopia of resources upon which we rely, and cause devastating damages to the ecosystems that sustain us.

E.O. Wilson compellingly continues: "Almost all of the crises that afflict the world economy are ultimately environmental in origin: climatic change, pollution, water shortage, defaunation, decline of arable soil, depletion of marine fisheries, tightening of petroleum sources, persistent pockets of severe poverty, the threat of pandemics, and a dangerous disparity of resource appropriation within and between nations. Unfortunately, while decision makers understand each of these problems to some degree, they typically continue to be addressed as separate issues. Yet the world has little chance to solve any one problem until we understand how all of them are connected through cause and effect. We will be wise to look upon ourselves as a species and devise more realistic and pragmatic approaches to all the problems we face as a whole. … We all operate by a worldview

distorted by the residues of hereditary human nature. We exist in a bizarre combination of Stone Age emotions, medieval beliefs, and godlike technology."

He also states: "We ought to develop a new kind of self-understanding, self-reflection, and self-imaging. Then we might be able to actually get somewhere together." In other words, we need Big Picture understandings! The ancient Rapanui people of remote Easter Island were known for their monumental iconic inward-looking stone statues. One wonders if either the rulers or common people of the island had any inkling of impending adversities that were going to be incurred as crucially-important native forests were decimated, and as the island's population continued, inexorably, to grow.

Were there no cautionary Rapanui voices? Were they incapable of foreseeing the dire implications of their unsustainable exploitive activities? Was there an equivalent of political bickering, obtuse obstinacy by decision-makers, gamesmanship, deceitful propaganda, and ideological polarization and strife in the face of what should have been an increasingly obvious depletion of resources so vital to their existence (like wood for boats)?

What if, I muse to myself, Henry David Thoreau was right when he declared: "In wildness is the preservation of man?" Deep ecologists note that it is critical for us to protect natural areas so that they will be able to serve as genetic storehouses for future generations. Once our virulent strain of extinction-causing assaults has run its course, all genetic diversity that has been preserved will provide life forms that manage to survive an opportunity to once again propagate themselves into habitats and ranges that have been disturbed and damaged by our heedless human actions.

"I am the Lorax. I speak for the trees! Let them grow!"

--- *The Lorax,* Theodor Seuss Geisel, aka Dr. Seuss

In 2009, Donald Trump and his three oldest children, Ivanka, Donald Jr. and Eric, signed an open letter printed in the New York Times urging President Obama and world leaders who were headed to international climate negotiations in Copenhagen to act on climate change. The letter stated that, "If we fail to act now, it is scientifically irrefutable that there will be catastrophic and irreversible consequences for humanity and our planet." But since so much money and power can be gained by aggressively boosting the fossil fuel industry, the Trump family seems to be just fine with causing catastrophic and irreversible consequences for humanity and planet Earth. This is insane -- and reprehensible. It is imperative that all of us collectively begin to honor precautionary wisdom, so we should throw all politicians out of office who betray farsighted principles.

Climate change is an unfolding tragedy, but it is also a crime, according to Nathaniel Rich — "a thing bad people knowingly made worse, for their personal gain. That, I suspect, is one of the many aspects to the climate change battle that posterity will find it hard to believe, and impossible to forgive."

Arch-conservative Dick Cheney, a former executive in the oil services industry, bizarrely stated in 2001: "Conservation may be a sign of personal virtue, but it is not a sufficient basis for a sound, comprehensive energy policy." Really? He made this remark to support his recommendation that the U.S. renew construction of nuclear, hydroelectric, oil-fired and coal-fired power plants, and that our nation drill aggressively for oil in sensitive habitats like the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska.

Aldo Leopold, the American ecologist, forester and environmentalist who is best known for having written *A Sand County Almanac,* would have strongly disagreed. As he once succinctly stated: "Having to squeeze the last drop of utility out of the land has the same desperate finality as having to chop up the furniture to keep warm."

This idea brings up the vital issue of our collective need for <u>sustainable</u> energy sources to power our activities and civilizations. When these words were first written, nuclear reactors had just failed in the wake of the devastating 3/11/11 earthquake and tsunami in Japan, and turmoil was embroiling a dozen Arab nations where rulers have oppressed their peoples by governing in undemocratic ways using ruthlessly repressive "security forces" and religious discrimination. Heightened religious conflicts were taking place in which Sunni people were oppressing Shiite people, or being oppressed by them, in many countries in the Middle East and around the globe. Muslims and Christians were pitted against each other, seemingly intransigently committed to an epic economic and cultural conflict over the absurd issue of whose God is the one-and-only right true absolute one.

Meanwhile, the global population of human beings first exceeded an incomprehensibly needy seven billion people in November 2011, and then eleven years later EIGHT BILLION in November 2022. And people in every country are trying to figure out how to break the shackles of money-monopolizing wealthy people so that they will be able to gain a fairer modicum of social justice. All these developments are intricately interconnected.

As Martin Luther King once said, We must rapidly begin the shift from a "thing-oriented" society to a "person-oriented" society. When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, materialism, and militarism are incapable of being conquered.

People who own most of the wealth in the world are driven by ego, greed, self-centered righteousness, status-seeking and compulsions to consume conspicuously. As a result of having so much money, they wield distinctly overweening power in every nation around the planet. They persistently use this power to demand and get public policies that allow them maximum privileges to exploit resources AND have a minimum amount of limitations on their actions. They staunchly oppose requirements that mandate fairer considerations of the greater good, especially when such rules limit their prerogatives, power and profit-maximizing opportunities.

The activities of wealthy people almost always include socially undesirable tactics like the privatization of profits while some costs of production are socialized by being externalized onto the public. This is simply wrong!

While the Biblical Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil seems to have gone extinct, it apparently generated a successor species before disappearing -- in a majestic Tree of the Awareness of Right and Wrong. Only by gaining a clearer and more ethical understanding of true right and wrong can we find better ways to create fairer, safer and more sustainable societies. The marvelous Tree of Life itself is facing calamitous threats as humanity obtusely prunes away at twigs, branches and even ungodly portions of the trunk itself. And look here, now -- timber barons are practically salivating at the prospects of prospective profits as they sharpen their saws with the benediction of "conservative" opponents of environmental protections. Thanks a lot, Republicans.

As Aldo Leopold noted, perhaps having spent some time under the broad canopy of the Tree of the Awareness of Right and Wrong: "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."

Republican Senator Lisa Murkowski of Alaska has long advocated that the U.S. increase oil production in the fragile ecosystems of Alaska. Senator Murkowski expressed the opinion in 2011 that we should deal with rising energy prices by reducing restrictions on oil drilling, and by *cutting* taxes on gasoline. She was just fine with the "Drill, baby, drill" mantra. (And she is one of the most moderate Republicans!)

Let us clearly understand the current situation. Americans burn about 7 billion barrels of oil each year. This is 25% of the total amount burned worldwide. We use this much despite the fact that we represent less than 5% of the world population. This is profligate use! Total petroleum imports represented about 60% of our annual use in 2012, before hydraulic fracturing of rock formations made the United States more energy independent, and imported supplies were very costly and highly vulnerable to geopolitical disruptions. Vladimir Putin's war against Ukraine has made the dangerous vulnerability of our dependence on oil and gas shockingly clear.

Republicans blame the government for restrictions and "shortsightedness", so they recommend that we boost domestic production of fossil fuels by reducing regulations and drilling more aggressively for oil in Alaska, and offshore, and mining coal and oil on public lands, and they oppose precautionary measures related to fracking activities. But the writing is clearly on the wall. Ecological precautionary principles tell us that we must reduce carbon emissions to keep global warming from increasing to levels that will cause unacceptably high costs. Disastrously, we are on track to blow past a livable emissions budget for the rest of this century by the year 2030. From this standpoint, "Drill, baby, drill" was a crazy prescription!

The process of fracking is altering our domestic production calculus in the short-term, but it is not changing the fact that our profligate burning of fossil fuels threatens to "double glaze" our providential home planet. We simply must adapt to leaving most reserves of fossil fuels in the ground, and burning them up at a slower rate to prevent the destabilization of the global climate and protect the prospects of our heirs.

Senator Murkowski emulated Dick Cheney is saying that the U.S. lacks a coherent energy policy. Most people would agree this is true, and as 2023 begins, the situation is rashly worse. Conservatives say that our policies are not coherent mainly because the government restricts production, while liberals feel that the need for conservation and greater efficiency of use is extremely important for future well-being, along with cleaner renewable energy alternatives. Liberals further believe that we need to rethink the degree to which we waste fossil fuels in our cities and suburbs, and in agricultural practices, and in military activities.

Our dependence on oil is a serious national security concern. It is risky from the following standpoints:

(1) Oil is imported from politically volatile countries in the world. This makes supplies vulnerable to disruptions or sudden price increases that might occur;
(2) The enormous cost of importing oil is a big financial drain on national economies;
(3) The costs of maintaining a vast military machine to protect our interests in the Middle East are contributing to record levels of national debt, and this fiscal problem is a serious national security concern in its own right;
(4) We are becoming increasingly vulnerable to oil price shocks and supply interruptions because people in other nations worldwide are also rapidly depleting these critically important resources;
(5) Grave health and environmental damages and threats are resulting from our collective combustion activities. Every year human beings spew many billions of tons of pollutants and carbon dioxide into the atmosphere as we profligately burn coal, gasoline, diesel fuel, heating oil, and natural gas. This contributes to growing health and environmental problems. And the number of polluting oil spills is obscene!

We should give closer consideration to these challenges. To formulate truly far-sighted national energy policies, we should stop giving big subsidies to powerful oil companies every year. These corporations are, after all, making enormous profits. Shouldn't we try harder to find good ways to wean ourselves from this dangerous addiction? Isn't it the moral right thing to do to make greater efforts to conserve resources and use fossil fuels radically more efficiently? Shouldn't we commit to efforts to develop alternatives to the burning of fossil fuels to a greater extent, on a scale greater than commitments made in the bold Apollo Space Program? The wisdom of precautionary principles resoundingly responds: "YES WE SHOULD!"

The best course of action would be to promote precautionary principles and sensible worldviews, and to spend less time and energy on efforts to rationalize boom-and-bust laissez-faire corporatism. We should dedicate ourselves to preventing Big Business from externalizing costs by socializing them, and begin to act in ways that are more honestly responsible to future generations. Crony capitalist "Disaster Capitalism" is simply proving to be too risky and too destructive. Far-reaching reforms are called for.

In many of our aggregate actions, it is as if we are chopping off the limb of the tree upon which our civilizations are perched. The distant echo of our agents hacking away at the massive biotic trunk of the tree of life is deeply unsettling. We can, and must, figure out new ways of living, and use smarter incentives and disincentives!

It is becoming crystal clear that we should work together to act with better stewardship to decisively address the existential imperative of protecting the ecological foundations of our well-being, now and in the future. We owe it to our children, and to all our descendants, to leave them a fairer legacy.

Unfortunately, our current collective actions presage a legacy of depleted resources, devastated fisheries, poisoned habitats, decimated old-growth forests, overheating planetary ecosystems and diminished biological diversity -- unless we soon begin to make an overarching commitment to changes in our habits, behaviors and economic and political systems. It is outrageously irresponsible, undisciplined, weak-willed, and self-centered for us to continue borrowing enormous sums of money from people in the future to stimulate these outcomes.

We should manage land and water and mineral resources better to ensure sustainable harvests. This is a more sensible plan than squandering resources in a manner that threatens our future well-being and drives untold numbers of species of plants and animals toward eternal extinction. It is markedly rash for us to collectively fail to protect vital ecosystems. It is crazy for us to fail to make concerted efforts to preserve the stability

of the Earth's climate and ecological conditions. Shortsighted actions can have far-reaching consequences. These facts make precautionary principles increasingly important.

We need to implement highly effective incentives and disincentives to cut down on pollution, toxic wastes and greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere. We should revolutionarily redesign our economic and political systems to prevent selfishly short-term-oriented interest groups from dominating our decision-making and despotically determining our national policies in ways that are contrary to the greater good. These vested interests are powerfully motivated to maintain the entrenched status quo, but we cannot allow them to prevent needed reforms. Sadly, we embarked on a rash backward trajectory in these regards from 2017 through 2021.

It came to me in the middle of the night, I thought, as I lay in a sunshine-flooded green meadow near the top of a hillside with an expansive view: *Every person in every country worldwide should be accorded the right to a maximum amount of individual freedoms.* This is true for all people in the United States, and those in China and Russia and other autocratic countries -- and in all in those Middle Eastern nations where economic, social and political turmoil erupted into violence and revolution in the harsh aftermath of the Arab Spring that began a decade ago. And within the larger context of these theoretically unalienable liberties, overarching responsibilities exist. Golden Rule responsibilities and resource conservation responsibilities. Ecological responsibilities and civic responsibilities and community responsibilities.

The U.S. should make a revolutionary commitment to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness for all Americans. Countries worldwide should also make similar commitments to human rights for their peoples. Religious and political freedom should be championed as bedrock principles for all. A greater modicum of fairness of opportunity should be established. Ecological sanity should be defended by choosing to support ecological precautionary principles that help guarantee greater respect for the foundations of our collective well-being.

We do, to an extent, make our destinies by the gods we choose. It is high time we cease worshipping money and power above all other values. It is important for us to stop giving special privileges to society's elites when that lavish generosity causes excessive public debt and extensive harm and exacerbated insecurities to the majority of people. We should begin to give more respect to our neighbors, our communities, and our descendants.

A true respect for the well-being of humanity, now and in the future, would guide us in more sensible directions. Such greater respect would lead us to pursue wiser priorities. It is foolish to fail to embrace precautionary principles related to environmental protections and emissions of climate-disrupting greenhouse gases. Consider this way of seeing from *Comprehensive Global Perspective: An Illuminating Worldview*: "Fresh ideas should be given greater sway, ones that are more consistent with greater good goals. The progressive Senator Paul Wellstone of Minnesota believed that politics should be about much more than power, money and winning at any cost. He made his convictions clear when he 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."

A Digression on Climate Disruptions

An article in the October 2011 issue of *National Geographic* magazine investigated an episode of global warming that took place 56 million years ago at the end of the Paleocene Epoch. A sudden dramatic increase in carbon dioxide in the atmosphere occurred way back then, probably caused by an intense period of volcanic activity associated with the opening up of the North Atlantic Ocean, as Greenland and the North American continent were pushed apart from the continent of Europe along the Mid-Atlantic Ridge rift zone. This impulse of greenhouse gases caused a global warming trend, which in turn thawed frozen methane molecules in polar regions and released them into the atmosphere, radically accelerating the warming trend.

Methane gases have a greenhouse warming effect that is many times more intense per molecule than carbon dioxide. Large deposits of methane hydrate exist today under the Arctic tundra and ocean floors. Such hydrates are stable only in a narrow range of cold temperatures or high pressures, so the warming being caused today by our rash burning of enormous volumes of oil, coal and natural gas could trigger a runaway release of methane from the frozen north and the deep seas. This occurrence could parallel the events at the time of the biotic calamity that brought the Paleocene to an end, causing mass species extinctions, so it is instructive to

investigate the impacts that this radical warming had on the Earth at the time. Evidence indicates that far-reaching destabilizing impacts occurred back then.

This is a good reason to embrace precautionary principles rather than continuing to burn fossil fuels at nearly the fastest possible rate to power our agricultural and industrial activities and to satisfy our residential and consumer-oriented needs and a military stationed in nearly 150 countries abroad. Nonetheless Republican politicians in the House radically used a legislative tool in 2017 called the Congressional Review Act to scrap critical protections, "permanently", against dangerous methane pollution from oil and gas drilling on public lands.

Global warming today is disrupting prevailing jet stream wind patterns, and generally altering the global climate. As a result, many regions are experiencing episodes of higher rainfall and flooding, while severe droughts are affecting other areas. Heat waves have killed thousands of people in India, and wildfires are burning more acres of land in the U.S. than ever before in recorded history. And the devastating 2017 hurricanes in Texas, Florida and the Caribbean, and in the Carolinas in 2018, and Florida in 2022, lend emphasis to these concerns.

As extreme weather events strike places worldwide, a growing consensus of knowledgeable climate experts warn us about dangers related to climate-disrupting activities. Economists, in turn, analyze the range of damages that can be expected because of unfolding changes in climatic conditions, and they calculate a range of costs that will be associated with coping with these changes. They compare these costs to a range of spending that would help prevent or mitigate climate changes and sea level rises, and they assess the impacts these outcomes will have on nations worldwide. Such analyses are swayed by assumptions made, and by political considerations, but we should think clearly and assess honestly, and take into account the broadest possible understandings and big picture perspectives. Trillions of dollars are at stake, and unfathomably risky unintended consequences.

These analyses involve gaping uncertainties. But we are in a Bet Situation, for we are inextricably "in the game", and we must make decisions about what courses of action to pursue. It would be wisest to make smart decisions. The best plan would be to develop scenarios of likely costs and impacts that are most reasonable, based on the most probable assumptions, and to then find the best balance between the costs of potential damages and the costs of sustained up-front spending on preventing or mitigating the changes, and on adapting to them. We need to find a good Goldilocks scenario, the 'just right' level of precautionary actions!

Conservatives in the U.S. are in the thrall of the laissez-faire propaganda of big corporations and the radical right, so they deny correlations between human activities and a myriad of weather-related disasters. They tend to pretend that spewing tens of billions of tons of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere every year is having no effect. They deny or ignore the fact that rapid deforestation in tropical regions is exacerbating the build-up of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. They deny that uncontrolled activities are causing, and will cause, huge future liabilities. Denial, however, does not diminish the likelihood of adverse outcomes. We really must be more honest and make assessments that are the most accurate possible, using science, not fiction. Then we should proceed accordingly, heeding the understandings of hundreds of scientific experts who are contributing to greater good goals by working on the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

III. Fiscal Precautionary Principles

Prudent national policies should be formulated that leave our country in a sound fiscal position so that we can afford the costs related to economic setbacks, natural disasters or other unforeseen adverse developments. Japan, for instance, has the third largest economy in the world, but it has run its economy into a danger zone by allowing its national debt to reach more than 200% of its annual economic output. This is the highest level of debt in the world, according to the CIA World Factbook. The percentage of Japan's debt to its GDP exceeds that of Greece, Italy, Iceland, Ireland or Portugal, which are all countries that suffered severe economic crises and dangerous national debt problems in the long aftermath of the recession of late 2008.

As a consequence, Japan was in a poor position to finance its recovery and reconstruction in the wake of the devastating earthquake and tsunami that struck on 3/11/11. The Japanese have been foolhardy to have allowed their fiscal situation to deteriorate to such an extent. The USA, inebriated on its own addiction to deficit spending, is also avoiding making difficult decisions between competing interests. We do this by taking the

expedient route of borrowing money and fleecing future generations to preserve entitlements and fight wars and continue to allow high-income people to pay historically low tax rates.

The importance of a Rainy Day Fund concept cannot be overstated. Instead of adopting a common sense precautionary fiscal approach like this, we are stimulating the economy, artificially creating maximized profits, and injudiciously squandering money and resources. By spending profligately and borrowing heavily, we are undermining our ability to cope with adversities. This is directly contrary to the goal of creating a rainy day fund. It makes our economy less flexible and less resilient. This course of action is incautious, imprudent, careless, heedless, reckless and improvident. It is, in essence, insane. We are tempting Providence!

Nations worldwide are being forced to try to reduce their unsustainably high debt loads at the same time that challenging economic conditions are buffeting many national economies. Austerity policies are a poor response, and so are continued indulgences in the expediency of huge quantities of deficit spending. In the competition to decide what programs to save or eliminate as a result, we should not lose sight of the difference between productive uses of debt and non-productive uses of debt. Productive debt, such as investments in public education, vital infrastructure, worker productivity, protections of public lands, and research and innovation, can actually serve to improve future prospects, rather than diminish them.

Competing interest groups argue about what entitlements we should have, and what social and infrastructure investments should be made. We should obviously make the best assessments, and then boldly act upon them.

The only sensible economic system in the long term is one that is NOT reliant on Ponzi-like schemes predicated on an ever-growing human population and national debt. There is no hope of achieving sustainable activities and using limited resources wisely unless we recognize the need to make a dramatic shift in our aggregate activities from nonrenewable resources to more renewable resources. Smart incentives should be used to encourage people to live within their means. Governments should provide only enough services and benefits as citizens are collectively willing to pay for, in fairly representative societies. And we must stop pandering primarily to rich people, as Republicans did with their Amazing Disgrace regressively-structured tax cuts in December 2017, as well as their budgets from 2017 through 2021, which could fairly be characterized as efforts to wage "a war against the poor".

Budgets should be established that are more balanced through a revised system of more steeply graduated taxes on income, capital gains and inheritances. And we should enact new laws that honor precautionary principles in fiscal matters so that we will position ourselves better for the daunting challenges that will be encountered as the twenty-first century unfolds!

IV. Social Precautionary Principles

In the lawless Wild West of yesteryear, "six-shooter aggression" and reactive vigilante justice ruled the day. Mark Twain attested to this characterization in *Roughing It*. A stagecoach in which he was riding in Nevada was held up at gunpoint, and the bandits ordered the passengers to STAND AND DELIVER! You'd better be sure they complied, fearing for their lives. In those days, conglomerate trusts back East were just beginning to seriously abuse power, and the wealthy were just beginning to stretch their peacock wings and get Gilded Age partying really under way.

Today, we should make sure our rules and laws are designed to create a safer and fairer system of opportunity and justice. Laws are unfortunately being routinely violated by self-interested individuals and entities so that they can make bigger profits or gain other benefits and advantages.

In the Earth Manifesto dissertation *Principal Reasons a Bill of Rights for Future Generations is Needed*, an exhaustive examination is made of the reasons that Social Precautionary Principles are necessary for a fairer and more secure future. The insights in that treatise are included herein by this reference.

A peaceful revolution is needed here in the U.S. to alter national priorities so that people and the environment are better protected. Costs associated with the military-industrial complex should be reduced. We should begin to honestly and fairly deal with the overarching challenges we face by preventing wealthy people and giant

corporations from abusing their outsized power to pollute the commons, exploit workers, export jobs abroad, externalize costs, contribute to the creation of an irresponsibly high and corruptly incurred national debt, and gain advantages at the expense of the vast majority of the people.

A revolution of the mind is what we really need. Perhaps it will come in the form of a providential spontaneous evolution of our worldviews, and of our perceptual awareness. Let us allow the feminine sensibilities within each one of us to become more ascendant. That may be an excellent way to create significantly fairer and more successful societies. Perhaps it is time to return to more holistic ways of seeing that pertained when Mother Earth goddesses were revered and Nature was more highly respected.

Dr. Leonard Shlain would surely have posited that a better balance between our intuitive right brains and our more analytical left brains would be good for our overall well-being. He wrote provocatively and at length about the desirability of a better balance between our feminine and masculine selves, and about the advantages of more respect for women's rights in various civilizations throughout history. See my essay *A Feminine Vision of an Achievable Better World – Anima Should Reign* for expansive perspective.

In any case, the pendulum swings. Since 1980 it has been swinging in the wrong direction, when considered from the standpoint of the whole of society. The pendulum is swinging from a sensible modicum of fairness to more unfairness, and from political centrism to a more right-wing laissez-faire "voodoo economics" extremism, replete with democracy undermining abuses of power. This is not evolutionarily advantageous!

Walking up the Supreme Court building steps, an observer sees the words etched above the front entrance, "Equal Justice Under Law." That is a great principle! But some of the current members of the Supreme Court act as though this equal justice is for corporate entities rather than the people, and certainly not for women when they take away federal constitutional reproductive rights.

The great Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg -- "the notorious RBG" -- memorably observed: "The decision whether or not to bear a child is central to a woman's life, to her well-being and dignity. It is a decision she must make for herself. When Government controls that decision for her, she is being treated as less than a fully adult human responsible for her own choices." In June 2022, Justices including Samuel Alito, Brett Kavanaugh and Amy Coney Barrett overturned *Roe vs. Wade,* outrageously contrary to the public will.

Thomas Paine wrote that he knew it is difficult to get over local or long standing prejudices, yet when the need becomes pronounced enough for us to feel obligated to suffer to examine these biases and preconceived notions, we may begin to see a clearer way forward. We can no longer afford to be a house divided against itself, and we can no longer remain fettered by obstinate prejudices, or let conservatives wield power ruthlessly.

V. <u>Financial Precautionary Principles</u>

Investment advisors sensibly recommend that the best investment plan in the long run is to diversify the assets in a portfolio between various asset classes. Putting all of one's eggs in a single basket is an approach that is imprudent. Since our government indulgently engages in inflationary monetary and fiscal policies, the purchasing power of savings is slowly undermined. This is why a dollar today is worth less than 30 cents relative to the value of a dollar in 1980. The effect of this devaluation of money over time is to cause savings to lose value.

Investors therefore seek higher returns by putting money in riskier investments. Government incentives for home ownership (mortgage interest deductions, low interest rates, tax-free allowances of capital gains on home sales, etc.) have made real estate a superior investment for many years. But these national policies led to people using home equity increases to spend profligately by borrowing against appreciating real estate values. This was a strong stimulus to consumer demand, and may have seemed to be a peachy condition while the bubble was inflating before it temporarily collapsed in 2008. But that collapse led to financial disaster with a prolonged period of depressed home prices, and millions of Americans lost homes to wrenching foreclosures.

In June 2011, homeowners had only 38% equity in their homes, down from 61% a decade earlier. This was near the lowest point since World War II. The unintended consequences of real estate bubble economics could have

been foreseen, and should now be better understood. Rashly misguided public and Federal Reserve policies have contributed to making this situation undesirably volatile.

Inflationary Fed policies have at times made gold and other commodities seemingly good investments, but the boom-and-bust nature of economic policies riskily makes prices unstable. Since these words were first written, the price of gold has been very volatile. Government and corporate bonds are potentially volatile because they are strongly influenced by interest rate fluctuations. Over the long run, stocks have proven to yield the highest average return of all investments in major asset classes. This is because stocks allow investors to gain a share of profits made by corporations in the international economy, and God knows that nations worldwide stumble all over themselves to give big corporations much of what they want to satisfy their narrow purposes. But equities are also highly volatile due to extensive uncertainties, market manipulations, competitive developments, emerging trends, excessive debt, rapid rates of inflation, geostrategic conflicts and cyclical spells of "irrational exuberance" and accompanying "wall of worry" fears.

In general, when some asset classes are gaining, others are losing. The precautionary idea behind a diversified portfolio is basically to hedge one's bets, and to own some things that will go up in value while others are going down. The goal is to keep ahead of inflation while not risking steep plunges in asset values due to overweight positions in any one speculative risk that goes bust.

Speculators are aware that there are more opportunities to make big profits during times when markets are volatile than when prices are steady, especially with put options and call options and other derivatives trading. But there are also much bigger chances of suffering disastrous losses. Long-term investors prefer more stable markets for a variety of good reasons. Let's heed this lesson and demand that the Federal Reserve gives more serious consideration to making sure markets are healthy and stable. The Fed should emphasize fiscal stability more than economic stimulus.

VI. Military Precautionary Principles

Our leaders need to recognize the overarching necessity to pursue more sound economic and military policies than our current stimulative deficit-spending system of "military Keynesianism". Military Keynesianism is the term used to describe government economic policies that stimulate the economy by spending huge amounts of borrowed money on weapons, munitions, military personnel and military operations abroad. In a pathetic irony, this strategy has become a tactic that is itself creating increasingly grave threats to our national security, especially because of excessive debt. To make our nation more secure, LESS spending on the military is called for, not increased spending. It's stupid to make our nation more vulnerable to financial cataclysms by indulging in wasteful and poorly controlled military spending.

Defense spending has practically become a sacred cow on the American political scene. It has been subjected to wholly inadequate cost controls, oversight and accountability. It has served as a cover for wasteful spending, bureaucracy, unethical profiteering and many types of misallocations of resources. Military stimulus spending goes to all 50 states, making politicians everywhere enthusiastic supporters of high levels of "defense spending", with the chorus intoning the mantra, "Jobs, jobs, jobs."

Military Keynesianism also makes it easier for our leaders to aggressively intervene in the affairs of other countries, rendering us less safe by goading blowback opposition and creating increasing numbers of people who regard us as enemies, war-mongers, imperialists, apostates, state-sponsored terrorists or evil oppressors.

"In my opinion," declared Defense Secretary Robert Gates in February 2011, "any future defense secretary who advises the president to again send a big American land army into Asia, the Middle East, or Africa should 'have his head examined', as General MacArthur so delicately put it."

The U.S. today spends much more money on its military, by far, than any other country in the world. This is bizarre, because we are getting poor value for our money. The "opportunity costs" of devoting so many resources to misguided goals are extensive, and this makes Military Keynesian policies counterproductive. Chalmers Johnson once made a poignant point: "Such expenditures are not only morally obscene, they are fiscally unsustainable." This is a dangerous state of affairs, indeed!

Chalmers Johnson also noted that, despite the fact that the Cold War had ended years earlier, "U.S. reliance on military Keynesianism has, if anything, been ratcheted up, thanks to the massive vested interests that have become entrenched around the military establishment. Over time, a commitment to both guns and butter has proven an unstable configuration. Military industries crowd out the civilian economy and lead to severe economic weaknesses. Devotion to military Keynesianism is a form of slow economic suicide."

Wars require great material sacrifices, as well as extensively stressful and disturbing physical and emotional sacrifices by those actually who do the fighting. Wars also necessitate extremely high monetary and social costs by those who must pay for the expensive conflicts. In this context, there is a cynical shortsightedness and shrewdness to the unethical strategy that facilitates the foisting of these costs and sacrifices upon those with little power, and those in the future with no voice in matters.

The citizens of Arab nations are making it drastically clear that people cannot trust their political leaders to make fair-minded reforms. Leaders everywhere are simply too inextricably vested in the status quo. Likewise, lobbyists for amoral corporations cannot be trusted to do the right thing, because their goals are very narrowly focused. We need to shift the balance of power to democratic fairness and actions that are more distinctly responsible to future generations. Public decision-making must be guided by sensible overarching principles.

For a more comprehensive perspective on issues of war and peace, see the online Earth Manifesto dissertation, *Reflections on War -- and Peace!* We all figuratively live <<Home, home on the range, Where the deer and antelope play; Where seldom is heard a discouraging word, And the skies are not cloudy all day>>, as the unofficial anthem of the American West goes. While this State Song of Kansas epitomizes an indomitable American spirit and encapsulates a positive sunny attitude, there are strangers on adjacent properties, some of them our agents, who are clear-cutting forests, drilling for oil, belching acrid-smelling coal smoke, polluting streams, spewing toxic and climate-altering emissions into the atmosphere, and squandering the common wealth, as if there will be no tomorrow.

Yet, naturally, there will be a tomorrow. And it will be one in which people's well-being depends on decisions we are collectively making today. We ignore this fact at our own peril, and at a terrible price to our children, and theirs. Let the sun shine in! In an even larger collective sense, a sense of purpose for us all together must of necessity involve acting responsibly for the rights and prerogatives of those in the future. Let us all commit ourselves to responsibly participating in helping make a global team effort to make the world a better place. And, in this case, think of the slyly witty definition: "a team effort is many people doing what I say." Ha!

VII. Political Precautionary Principles

Will and Ariel Durant wrote in *The Lessons of History* that the concentration of wealth in societies occasionally reaches a critical point where either sensible legislative redistributions of wealth are enacted, like progressive tax reforms, or else increased violence and possibly even destructive revolutions take place that generally destroy wealth rather than redistributing it.

It would be safer for all Americans if we were to create a fairer and more just society, rather than one that is increasingly unfair due to growing disparities in income and wealth between the elite rich and all others. To make our nation healthier and more secure, we must reform our system of taxation and money in politics NOW! The extremely partisan and wrongheaded Trump Folly tax plan that Republicans rammed through into law in December 2017 was the antithesis of this sensible direction.

Only those who are repentant for egregious sins are deserving of the amazing grace of forgiveness. By deviously designing a tax bill that makes winners of a small minority and relative losers of a vast majority, scheming Republican politicians further "divided the blue states from the red, the Democrats from the Republicans. It is evil in the extreme", declared California Governor Jerry Brown.

Fairly focused political reform is needed because of the extraordinary economic and demographic changes that have taken place in recent decades. Consider the fact that the size of our early human clans was probably less than 30 people, on average, while today our social groups consist of entire societies of millions of people. Remarkable urbanization trends have occurred in the past century in the U.S., as reflected in statistics that

show only 40% of Americans lived in urban areas in the year 1900, and now more than 80% of Americans live in cities and metropolitan areas and suburbs.

With such significant changes, the need for social cohesion and lower levels of aggression and violence between groups has increased dramatically. The social danger associated with allowing radical increases in inequalities of income, wealth and political influence is becoming more pronounced as increasing inequalities of opportunity and social mobility effectively make everyone less secure. Extreme insecurity often tends to make people engage in uncivilized atavistic behaviors, and this creates increased dispositions toward crime, violence, insurrectionary fervor, or terrorism. Such actions are maladaptive for society as a whole.

The privileged already live in gated communities in the U.S. and we have strong police and military forces. If we continue to let privileged people increase their advantages while all others become more insecure, the privileged will jealously demand more fortress-like protections, harsher laws and more authoritarian rule. Revolutionary discord is brewing, and will get worse if we are unable to collaborate together to reduce the inequality and insecurity of the vast majority of the people. A budgetary war on the poor is a very bad idea in these regards.

The simple fact of the matter is that "everyone does better when everyone does better". Public policies should be targeted to ensure that the maximum numbers of people do better, not just the few who already monopolize a large part of the wealth. The most important political reforms, to start with, would be to stop giving corporations too much influence. We should not give them the legal rights of personhood, and we should act to limit the amount of money spent by wealthy people and corporate entities in our elections and in lobbying.

We would be wise to recall Martin Luther King Jr.'s words: "Ultimately a genuine leader is not a searcher of consensus, but a molder of consensus." We as a country need to choose to undergo a new and radical revolution of values. We should begin a rapid shift from a materialistic "thing-oriented" society to a "person-oriented" society. The creature comforts of conspicuous consumption have a seductive allure that is an impulse toward resource-wasting consumerism and shallow materialism. A better sense of balance is needed!

Martin Luther King, Jr. once provocative stated "True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar. It comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring." Let's just do it, and do it fairly! People, rather than money and property and profits, should be guaranteed a greater importance of priority. The lion's share of benefits in our societies must be more fairly shared. Racism and wasteful materialism -- and aggressive militarism -- must be emasculated.

What could go wrong if we ignore growth constraints and continue to allow heedless exploitation and depletion of resources? What could go wrong if we continue to let our advertising-stimulated "needs" and selfish impulses wreak terrible damages upon the natural world through a ferocious and poorly controlled assault against entire ecosystems and the best long-term interests of millions of species of life, including our own?

The "filthy rich" are betraying all other Americans by abusing the influence of their money to corrupt our national decision making, drive up the national debt, greedily grab excessive benefits for themselves, impose austerity measures and hardships on poor and vulnerable people, and discriminate against women in pay while depriving them of natural rights to make decisions regarding their reproductive choices. The hubris of these scheming folks is becoming a danger to everyone. Their eagerness to fool people into supporting a backward agenda in order to concentrate wealth ever more narrowly in the hands of the few is a threat to democratic fair-mindedness, social cohesion, ethical action, environmental sanity and sustainable existence.

Republican politicians egregiously pander to these wealthy people to get power and benefits for themselves, effectively robbing from the poor to give to the rich. They get away with these schemes by deviously pushing propaganda and emotionally manipulative deceptions that convince red state supporters that they care about them, even though they are being merciless in their greed, ambition, cruelty and anti-egalitarian agenda.

Concrete Examples of the Need for Precautionary Principles

A political cartoon in the Washington Post in March 2011 showed thick smoke billowing from a nuclear power plant in Japan and oil spilling from a BP oil rig, and the housing market symbolically melting down in flames, and

the atmosphere being polluted with particulate emissions spewing from industrial smokestacks. A building that represents the economy lies in ruins, and there is a billboard above Wall Street that reads: "For bigger profits, take bigger risks." One guy on Wall Street is looking up at the sign, cognizant of these daunting afflictions at that moment in time, and saying to another behind a desk, "MAYBE IT'S TIME WE TOOK THAT DOWN."

The time has come today to more sensibly restrict the amount of risk-leveraging that bankers and speculators are allowed to take. Risk takers must be required to bear the costs of risks gone wrong, instead of having the government bail them out with taxpayer money, or even worse using borrowed money and mortgaging the future for the sins of the bad design and inadequate accountability of our corrupt econopolitical system.

Radical risk-taking is a socially unacceptable form of shortsighted folly. Professor Robert Reich wrote the following wise commentary in an insightful Sunday opinion article titled, "Safety on the Cheap Invites Disaster":

> "No company can be expected to build a nuclear reactor, an oil well, a coal mine, or anything else that's 100 percent safe under all circumstances. The costs would be prohibitive. It's unreasonable to expect big corporations to totally guard against small chances of every potential accident. Inevitably, there's a trade-off. Reasonable precaution means spending as much on safety as the probability of a particular disaster occurring, multiplied by its likely harm to human beings and the environment if it does occur.
>
> Here's the problem: Profit-making corporations have every incentive to underestimate these probabilities and lowball the likely harms. This is why it is so necessary to have such things as government regulators, and why regulators need enough resources to enforce the regulations.
>
> And it's why recent proposals in Congress to cut the budgets of agencies charged with protecting public safety are so wrong-headed. One such proposal would reduce funding for the tsunami warning system. Another would ban the Environmental Protection Agency from regulating air pollution, including cancer-causing contaminants.
>
> It's also why regulators have to be independent of the industries they regulate. … And finally, the tendency of corporations to understate the probabilities of public harms requires that limits be placed on corporate political power. The public cannot be adequately protected as long as big corporations -- GE, BP, Halliburton, Massey and all others -- are allowed to bribe legislators with campaign donations and boondoggles."

This brilliantly coherent explanation should help us formulate better solutions to challenges. But here is the catch. Big conflicts of interest exist between private activities and the greater public good, now and in the long run, so resistance is powerful to the best common good solutions. This reality makes it imperative for us to collectively commit to championing more reasonable precautionary principles. Due to the unfairly distorting influence of Big Money in our political duopoly system, we have, as a nation, chosen to allow the "polluter pays principle" to be circumvented. Those who are responsible for pollution are thus able to foist some costs of their activities onto governments and people, and thus onto taxpayers and society at large. This is a violation of the cost internalizing Principle 16 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, which concerns real costs related to pollution. We need to restructure the rules in our country to reinstitute polluter pays principles!

Long ago, in the year 1339, the Italian painter Ambragio Lorenzetti finished frescos whose message resonates with us today as Trump Republicans and their loyalist supporters attack the values that define America. Lorenzetti's "Allegory of Good and Bad Government" is a reminder that good government is characterized by Justice, Concord, Peace and Wisdom while bad government is animated by Division, Avarice, Fury, Vainglory and Tyranny. When good government reigns, things are much better for the citizenry, while in extreme contrast, when bad government plagues the realm and despotic leaders rule, they usurp the power of the people and the citizens suffer the consequences. Let us choose a more positive path forward.

Truly,
Dr. Tiffany B. Twain
January 1, 2023 (begun in January 2011 and updated occasionally since then)

Sustainability Index

Latest update: January 1, 2023

This Sustainability Index has been designed to gauge the true status of the sustainability of human activities on our home planet, and to provide people with a good measure of where we stand in efforts being made to leave a fairer legacy to our heirs in future generations.

This Index assesses the most significant factors that contribute to human well-being. It contains 45 indicators that together reveal a grand struggle between a status quo that is driving a deterioration of biological living conditions on Earth and an emerging understanding of better ways forward that could restore the potentialities for outcomes that are more salubriously consistent with the greater good for humanity.

This Sustainability Index began to flash an ominous red warning signal in May 2013. The tipping point for this development occurred when the 400 ppm threshold in the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere was exceeded for the first time in human history. The on-going annual net increase of this greenhouse gas in the atmosphere tipped this Index from the evaluation, "Risky prospects, with transformative changes needed to be sustainable", to a much more serious evaluation, "Poor prospects, and definitely unsustainable, with epic future disruptions likely." By May 2022, carbon dioxide peaked at 421 ppm, and is increasing 2ppm every year.

One of the proverbial canaries in the coal mine are dropping dead, warning us of a worsening state of conditions for life on Earth. This development highlights a growing urgency for us to understand the big picture impacts that our aggregate human activities are having on Earth's biosphere. In 2005, more than 1,200 experts in 95 countries had spent four years assembling the comprehensive *Millennium Ecosystem Assessment,* and published the findings of this evaluation, ominously revealing far-reaching details of how 60% of Earth's vital ecosystems are being degraded. This depletion of natural capital is "putting such strain on the environment that the ability of the planet's ecosystems to sustain future generations can no longer be taken for granted." This is not good!

A review of the 45 specific parameters assessed in this Index makes it clear how challenging it will be for us to achieve long-term sustainability. The risks are rapidly increasing for us to continue misusing Earth's resources. The total number of human beings alive has tripled since 1950, and since the carrying capacity of damaged ecosystems is less than the carrying capacity of healthy ones, it is becoming increasingly urgent for us to support family planning programs and take steps to reduce harms we are causing to natural habitats and ecosystems.

It is startling to realize that the growth of our global population has shown a net increase of more than 70 million people each and every year since 1965. This increase in human numbers is equivalent to adding more than 80 new cities the size of San Francisco every year, and to locate most of them in poor nations. Surely this is a bad plan for future well-being of the human race! We would be smart to begin to recognize that there is a strong Population Connection to ecological challenges, and to act accordingly to ensure a more propitious future.

Skim the Evaluation of the Status of Sustainability below, and skip to the important Observational Commentary that follows this Index for valuable perspectives. Later, study the details. Readers are heartily encouraged to think about both the categories assessed and the evaluations made in this Index. We should be honestly realistic with ourselves, and others, in our assessments at this crucial juncture in history. As Nelson Mandela once said: "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

Evaluation of the Status of Sustainability

Ecological, economic, societal and political factors are each valued on a scale of 1 to 5. These numbers are evaluated as follows:

5 - Sustainable for an indefinite period of time
4 - Sustainable, if important reforms are made
3 - Unsustainable, but remediable with concerted efforts
2 - Unsustainable, and requiring transformative changes in incentives and human behaviors
1 - Definitively, shortsightedly and likely disastrously unsustainable

	Initial Rating Jan. 1, 2012	Latest Rating Jan. 1, 2023
	(Lower number = Worse state)	
I. Ecological Factors		
1. Global deforestation rate	3	3
2. Depletion rate of oil and natural gas reserves	2	2
3. Depletion rate of coal reserves	3	3
4. Status of clean fresh water supplies worldwide	2	2
5. Success in recycling, reusing, and reducing wasteful consumption	2	2
6. Proportion of power generated from renewable sources	2	2
7. Depletion rate of agricultural phosphate minerals	2	2
8. Carbon-dioxide concentration in the atmosphere (see Footnote 1)	4	3
9. Wetlands protection trend	3	3
10. Fisheries health and extent of overfishing	2	2
11. Adherence to the Clean Air Act and Clean Water Act	3	3
12. Ecological footprint impact (see Footnote 2)	3	3
13. Rate of species extinctions	3	3
14. Living Planet Index status evaluation	3	2
15. Progress toward a more holistic and ecologically sane worldview	2	2
II. Economic Factors		
16. Level of U.S. national debt	1	1
17. Total government debt in nations worldwide	1	1
18. Retirement security for the majority of people	2	2
19. Progressive/regressive structure of graduated income tax rates	2	2
20. Commitments to infrastructure maintenance and investment	2	2
21. Financial volatility gauge of the Dow Jones Industrial Average	2	2
22. Unemployment and underemployment in the United States and Europe	2	1
23. Inflation rate and interest rates	4	5
24. Costs of weather-related natural disasters	3	2
III. Societal Factors		
25. Inequality status	1	1
26. Global population growth rate	2	2
27. Teenage pregnancy rate	3	3
28. Rates of child mortality and maternal death rate in pregnancy	3	3
29. Poverty gauge in aggregate	2	2
30. Improving overall average quality of life	2	2
31. Diseases, and life span of people worldwide	4	2
32. Legal open-mindedness in personal right-to-die decisions	3	3
33. Educational awareness of proper long-term priorities	2	2

IV. Political Factors

34. International level of violent conflicts and number of refugees	2	2
35. Global spending on guns, munitions and wars	1	1
36. Ascendancy of cooperation over ruthlessness of competition	2	1
37. Commitment to curbing the externalization of costs onto society	1	1
38. Climate Change Denial Danger **	2	2
39. Anti-environmentalism fervor gauge	2	1
40. Partisanship: Balance between conservatism and liberalism	1	1
41. Political corruption gauge and concentration of wealth	3	1
42. Fairness of the criminal justice system in the U.S.	2	2
43. Corporate and government transparency and accountability	2	2
44. Status of women's rights worldwide	2	2
45. Progress toward ratifying a Bill of Rights for Future Generations	1	1
Totals	101	92

SUSTAINABILITY STATUS EVALUATION:

Under 100 - Poor prospects, and definitely unsustainable, with epic future disruptions likely.
100 - 115 - Risky prospects, with transformative changes needed to be sustainable.
116 - 130 - Encouraging progress toward sustainable existence.
131 - 225 - Salubrious progress toward sustainable existence.

See Postscript for HISTORICAL RECORD OF CHANGES MADE IN ASSESSMENTS.

Bold Actions for Improving Prospects

It would be natural to wonder if this Sustainability Index reveals that we are in completely desperate straits, or whether there are smart things we could be doing that would substantially improve our future prospects. Here are three proactive initiatives that should be undertaken to improve future prospects and reverse the downward spiral in hopes for living sustainably on Earth far into the future:

First, we should adopt a farsighted Bill of Rights for Future Generations, as proposed in this manifesto. This should be done in every country worldwide. Let's be bold, and try to make sure that the USA leads the way!

Second, we should convene an International Sustainability Conference to study and report on the implications of the trends reflected in the Sustainability Index, and to identify steps that should be taken to improve the quality of life for people alive today, while simultaneously protecting the prospects of our descendents in the future. Representatives of all nations should be included in efforts to make this determination, and concerted actions should be taken that are consistent with the findings.

Third, we should make a sustained international effort to slow the growth of human numbers and improve the quality of life for those alive by mitigating future problems of hunger, water scarcity and losses of biological diversity. These efforts should include a global effort to provide free contraception and family planning services to all women who want them. Such actions would help reduce pressures on natural resources, and more importantly, they could help improve the quality of life of many of the world's poorest people. This would allow them better hopes of rising out of poverty and enjoying life-enriching things that many people take for granted.

"When we are planning for posterity, we ought to remember that virtue is not hereditary."

--- Thomas Paine

Observational Commentary by Dr. Tiffany B. Twain, creator of this Index

Forests, wetlands, rivers, oceans, wild areas and natural systems provide human beings with critically valuable ecosystem services. These services include nutrient recycling, flood control, regulation of the climate, water purification, oxygen generation, and the providing of lumber, food, fresh water and mineral resources. Pollinators like bees also play a crucial role in our well-being. Healthy natural habitats and undamaged natural systems are basic underpinnings of our prosperity and survival, so we humans should begin to give them much

more respect and protection. We should seek ways to stop mindlessly messing with Mother Nature and harming her ability to continue providing these essential ecosystem services.

Scientists estimate that ecosystem services contribute more than twice as much value every year in the global economy as the total gross national product of all countries combined. The implications are clear: it would be prudent for us to give much better protections to Earth's ecosystems, and thus help ensure a auspicious future that is sustainable for ourselves and our heirs.

Western religions all posit a notion of redemption through the grace of some savior. Astonishingly, we are now beginning to realize here in the 21st century that we humans ourselves are the best potential answer to our own prayers. Hope is to be found in our ability to use attentive foresight to accurately understand the challenges we face and the best courses of action. We can succeed in saving ourselves by changing our mission from one based on lavish enrichment of a relative few individuals who are exceedingly financially fortunate to a smarter mission that encompasses the flourishing of our species as a whole in the long run.

Aware of desperate circumstances that seem to be converging toward widespread and far-reaching calamity, we are beginning to see that we must work together to accomplish this new mission by seeking inspired solutions to the challenges we collectively face. The more closely we calibrate our aggregate behaviors to sustainable activities, the better off we will be. As asserted by the authors of the fascinating book *Spontaneous Evolution*, we humans can choose to heal ourselves once we accept our true responsibility "to collectively tend the Garden rather than fight over the turf."

"Man is a strange animal, he doesn't like to read the handwriting on the wall until his back is up against it."
--- Adlai Stevenson

Things to Ponder

One of the main objectives of the *Millennium Ecosystem Assessment* was to evaluate the options we have for restoring, preserving, conserving or enhancing the sustainable use of natural resources and ecosystems in the face of increasing demands being placed on them. One conclusion reached in this landmark report was that many good options exist, but that they involve "significant changes in policies, institutions and practices that are not currently under way." It seems obvious that our overarching obligation should be *to get these new policies and practices underway!* Those who oppose or obstruct this epiphany, repent!

It would be smart for us to find ways to make transformational changes in our political and social institutions so that we will be able to adapt, rather than maladaptively resisting or preventing remedial change. Our failure to take bold steps in the face of looming challenges exposes us to undesirable trade-offs and negative feedback loops, and to "increased risks of nonlinear changes". Such developments could cause severe adversities to billions of people worldwide. Even the Pentagon has articulated the possibility that disruptive "abrupt climate change" will likely occur if we deny the heightening risks, and thus create a grave threat to national security.

"These problems, unless addressed, will substantially diminish the benefits that future generations obtain from ecosystems." Doggone it -- just when people in the future are very likely to want less severely compromised ecosystem services! There are positive synergies in natural systems and the services they provide, and we are well advised to better understand their complex nature. This is a needed first step toward finding the resolve to fairly deal with these challenges. Awareness of the wisdom contained in precautionary principles is needed. These ideas are articulated and explored in *Intelligent Precautionary Principles Enunciated – Holy Cow!*

Stunningly, Republicans in the dumbed-down House of Representatives in 2014 passed an amendment to the National Defense Authorization bill that would prevent the Department of Defense from using funds to assess climate change and its implications for national security. "Conservatives" in Congress irrationally don't want to know that experts say it is an inadvisably dangerous "threat multiplier" to continue to recklessly stimulate the uncontrolled release of greenhouse gases emissions into the atmosphere. Revealingly, 227 Republicans basically voted for ignorance, and these scheming politicians have been given tens of millions of dollars in contributions from fossil fuel industries. This is institutionalized bribery! This corporate corruption is why these unapologetic pandering partisans advocate that we stick our heads in the sand, contending that it's the absolute

best national plan. In the November 2014 elections, Republican politicians gained control of the U.S. Senate despite the fact that they are irresponsibly denying both science and rationality by refusing to help solve big problems like anthropogenic climate disruptions. On January 21, 2017, an alarming climate change denier became president. As Thomas Paine succinctly put it, "Where knowledge is a duty, ignorance is a crime."

A Cause of Great Worth

Thomas Paine reckoned that Americans were living in times that severely tried men's souls. He expressed this sentiment on the eve of the Revolutionary War for independence of the original 13 colonies from Great Britain. Paine passionately proclaimed that the long-suffering colonists had it in their power "to begin the world over again" and to take control of their own fates. He judged that the American people were at a critical juncture, declaring: "The sun never shined on a cause of greater worth. 'Tis not the affair of a city, a country, a province, or a kingdom, but of a continent …"

Today, we are beset by extraordinarily serious challenges that are daunting in their complexity and global scope, and consternating in their impactful implications. The good cause of dealing effectively and fairly with these challenges critically affects all of humanity. This is not merely the affair of a city, a country, a province, a kingdom or a continent, but of all of humanity, and of all life on Earth.

Once again, bold leadership and the courage of enlightened convictions is called for. And once again the tyranny of power-abusing dominating factions is blocking the path to good resolutions of our dilemmas. Once again we need to declare independence from the powers-that-be to ensure a better future for people in posterity. The option supported by "conservatives" of clinging to the status quo, or making retrogressive moves, creates unnecessary risks that are too grave to be accepted. The long-term well-being of the human race is now at stake, and maybe even its survival. Decisive commitments must be made to finding prudent, sensible, fair-minded, visionary, and broadly advantageous solutions to the really big challenges we face.

An online Happy Planet Index claims to be "the leading global measure of sustainable well-being." The Happy Planet Index measures how well a country converts the finite resources of the Earth into the happiness and well-being of its citizens. The Happy Planet Index ranked the United States in 2012 as 105th out of 151 countries analyzed. This is a national disgrace! The reason the United States ranks so low is because our ecological footprint is excessively heavy and the amount of inequality in our society is extreme. These factors contribute to a lower level of "experienced well-being", and a lower life expectancy, on average, than for people in many other countries. We could, and rightly should, do better! Bravo for the exemplary example of Costa Rica for being best!

The Role of the Rapture Index

One of the inspirations for the genesis of the idea to create this Sustainability Index came from the "Rapture Index". Google this online Index, and review the 45 components listed in it. Then think objectively about the implications of the doomsday biblical dogmas that are assumed by the person who cooked up this ridiculous Rapture Index. This must be a true believer, because the Index makes bizarrely confused presumptions about correlations of cause and effect in the real world. Contemplate the laughably superstitious suppositions that went into the choice of categories in the Rapture Index, and in the odd assessments made in each category. This Index supposes, for instance, that things like volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, droughts, floods, "wild weather", "liberalism", and "Satanism" are signaling the coming advent of calamitous End Times, as supposedly foretold in the Bible. Such presumptions and fatalistic attitudes mislead us, and divert us from applying our energies toward positive ways to make the world we live in a better place.

> "Every man has a right to his own opinion, but no man has a right to be wrong in his facts."
>
> --- Bernard Baruch, prominent member of Franklin D. Roosevelt's "Brain Trust"

In dramatic contrast to the Rapture Index, the Sustainability Index is based on common sense, extrapolated trends, curiosity-enriched knowledge, intelligent evaluation and intuitive understanding. Each of the 45 factors measured in the Sustainability Index has a direct bearing on our ability to live sustainably in the future. The criteria chosen in this Index are designed to measure the true state of conditions on Earth. These important

criteria have a direct measurable impact on the overall level of human well-being. This assessment is being made with empathetic awareness and clear visions of an achievable better future. Only by making an overarching commitment to greater good goals can we create improved hopes for more sustainable societies.

Our economic system, as currently constituted, can be seen to manifest critical shortcomings. We must reform and restructure it, taking into account the mounting costs and escalating harmful impacts of our collective activities. Common sense tells us that greater good goals will be found in reversing current negative trends and making concerted efforts to improve our rating in the Sustainability Index in coming years. The wisest course of action is probably to be found in utilizing market forces and smart targeted incentives to achieve fairness-oriented objectives. Things like a carbon tax, to effectively internalize huge costs unjustly being externalized.

It is staggering to realize there are now almost 8 billion people alive on Earth, up from 1 billion in the year 1800, and 2 billion in 1930, and 3 billion in 1960. An estimated 15 billion more people will probably be born in the next 100 years. These numbers are stunning, and they provide compelling evidence that better ways must be found to reach a consensus about the optimum means to achieve common good goals.

Using collaborative problem solving and feeling empathy in understanding, we could formulate win/win solutions to intergenerational conflicts that so bedevil our societies and undermine the prospects of our descendants. By working together for the common good, we could ensure that we will be able to continue to live on Earth without destroying the vital balance of natural ecosystems, and the health of the natural world upon which we depend.

To slow down the ecological catastrophe unfolding on planet Earth and to better prepare ourselves for the challenging days that lie ahead, we should require a revolutionary policy shift in all countries. Instead of giving top priority to maximizing profits and perks for the richest 1% of people, we should require all costs currently being externalized onto society to be internalized. By mandating the inclusion of such costs in the price of every product sold and every service rendered, a fairer calculus will be made in all resource usages and buying decisions. The costs being externalized today include those related to air pollution, water pollution, harms to people's health, mounting costs for intensifying natural disasters, resource depletion and the introduction of systemic risks. This new method of full-cost accounting would not only influence people's purchasing choices, but it would also raise money to help finance fairness initiatives and more ecologically sane courses of action. And it would help defray the large expenses currently being unfairly foisted onto everyone in the future.

See "A Vibrant and Sound Economy", the 7th initiative in *One Dozen Big Initiatives to Positively Transform Our Societies,* for a plan that would help rectify the undesirable aspects of misguided laws that allow too many costs to be foisted onto the public.

Glory Or Degradation? GOD!

More than 2,500 years ago when the Old Testament of the Bible was being written and revised, it may have been good advice for God to have instructed humanity to be fruitful and multiply, and to subdue the earth and have dominion over every living thing. There were less than 100 million people on the entire planet back then, and human impacts on animal life and ecosystems were negligible, compared to today. But many events have taken place since then, and during this time the human population has grown dramatically. When our total numbers first exceeded seven billion people, around the beginning of the year 2012, people at the respectable organization Population Connection once again sounded a reverberating clarion call.

To be fruitful and multiply was a good decree back when people were writing the Bible because big families were a good source of cheap labor in agrarian communities, and it was a form of old age security to have lots of children so that parents would have younger generations to take care of them later in life. Besides, child mortality rates were extremely high in those days. Since then, things have changed significantly, and having big families has become expensive for parents and exceedingly costly for our heirs. The biblical prescription to multiply was suspiciously correlated with the narrow self-interest of patriarchal Church establishments to gain and maintain power and influence and material wealth by having renewable sources of indoctrinated followers.

Today, rapid growth in numbers of faithful adherents in Christian and Islamic churches has become a danger to peaceable coexistence and a potentially serious adversity, when considered from the standpoint of the long-

term greater good. Vigorous opposition by religious authorities to family planning, contraception and respect for the reproductive prerogatives of women in male-dominated societies is now creating a new set of overarching obligations. We now need God to tell us to GO FORTH AND ADD, because only by assessing properly will we comprehend the ominous ramifications of pro-natal reproductive policies, and of opposition to contraception and safe abortions and better women's healthcare in countries worldwide.

An Aside on God

Many folks believe that a personal God exists, a deity that apparently has a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde personality. This God is supposed to be caring and loving, yet at the same time judgmental and harshly punitive to human beings for their shortcomings, weaknesses, foibles and "sins". An image arises of this caring God being deafened by a cacophony of prayers from people pleading for 'His' good grace to spare them an infinite litany of deprivations, hardships, diseases, anxieties, humiliations, suffering and pain.

Each and every one of us will leave a personal legacy, and it is the ultimate moral obligation for us all to leave a legacy in aggregate that is reasonably auspicious for the generations of people who will follow us. We are doing much too lousy a job today of creating a positive legacy for future generations.

Moral, *adj.* Conforming to a local and mutable standard of right. Having the quality of general expediency.
--- Satirical definition in *The Devil's Dictionary,* by Ambrose Bierce

The word sin, ironically, was originally derived from the sport of archery. It literally meant "missing the mark". The Bible borrowed this little word and twisted it into meaning disobedience to God's injunction against eating the fruit of a Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the Garden of Eden. The Bible alleges that ever since Adam and Eve disobeyed God by eating the fruit of this tree, every human being has been paying the price for this Original Sin in struggle, adversities, enmity and eventual death. God cursed females even more harshly, on account of Eve's disobedience, making them suffer sorrow and pain in childbirth and the impactful ignominy of being relegated to subservient roles under males ever since then. We're all paying the price of this terrible divine retribution for the errors of Adam and Eve. This story is a whopper! We've been framed!

Humanity is, however, definitely missing the mark, as measured by the extent to which we are failing to create societies that are dramatically fairer to females. Let's lionize societies that are not only fairer but also more secure, more intergenerationally considerate, more environmentally sound, and more ecologically sustainable.

The Bible also says that not long after God had created man and woman in 'His' own image, God "saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Yikes! The LORD was so grievously disappointed in his creatures that 'He' decided to destroy them all, along with all the beasts and birds and creeping things that 'He' had created on this outpost of life in the Universe. After hatching a plan to save two of every kind of animal, 'He' brought a terrible flood upon the earth and drowned everything except the few saved humans and a couple of each kind of animal aboard Noah's ark (and, presumably, except for all the fishes and marine mammals, which are not bothered by floods!).

In my opinion, God would have been significantly more pleased with 'His' pet project human beings if they showed more love, compassion and brotherly and sisterly good will to each other, and less violence, greed, mean-spiritedness, selfishness, ignorance, corruption, and slavish obedience to materialistic consumerism.

During Adlai Stevenson's 1956 presidential campaign, a woman called out to him, "Senator, you have the vote of every thinking person!" Stevenson called back "That's not enough, madam, we need a majority!" Ha!

Left brain, right brain, corpus collosum. For an enlightening introspection into the homespun "rest of the story" related to mystical topics like these, see *Revelations of a Modern Prophet* online. Also, check out the essay *Rapture Mania: Bizarre Beliefs and Epic Epiphanies* for interesting perspectives. The Buddha would have looked on with contemplative approval, and would likely have been quietly astonished at what has come to pass in the 2,500 years since he lived.

Another Glance toward the Rapture Index

I'm serious -- check out the Rapture Index! It is a veritable triumph of a torturous imagination, and it is

impressive how finely hewed it is to a bizarrely lopsided version of "the absolute truth". Mark Twain would have delightedly roared in disapprobation. When one honestly reflects on the absurd ideas that underlie the Rapture Index, it could easily seem like Mark Twain's cynically astute observations made about the Bible and religion in his posthumously published *Letters from the Earth* are quite well justified.

What, one might wonder, are the chances that an angry God is going to destroy the Earth in a way prophesized in ancient "holy book" scriptures? Are prophesies credible that are part of a manipulative sublapsarian Garden of Eden story that contains a shrewd hook holding that the main condition for believers to be saved is that they profess belief in this creation story? How could millions of people really believe the Word of a book written by many authors over a thousand-year period, long ago, that alleges there will be a desirable afterlife in Heaven for believers, and a grotesque burning in Hell forevermore for everyone else who does not accept this story as literal truth?

"We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are."

--- Anais Nin

It is certain that the world is not going to end the way the Bible says. An enormous amount has been learned about the geologic nature of the Earth in the last 60 years alone, including the earth-shaking understandings of Plate Tectonics that shed wondrous illumination on the true physical causes of earthquakes and volcanic activity. We have become increasingly aware of the real nature of the serious predicaments we face, and of the probable ecological adversities we will encounter in coming decades. These understandings provide a much better idea of the unfolding fate of Earth's denizens than the laughable postulates of the "prophetic speedometer" found in the Rapture Index.

Suddenly a new perspective comes to me, informed by non-violent activist Mahatma Gandhi, who once observed, "Every conflict is one between different angles of vision, illuminating the same truth." Maybe the Rapture Index isn't just the delusions of a gullible guy predicting doomsday and professing blind faith in idiotically literal interpretations of biblical prophecies. Maybe the Rapture Index should be more accurately regarded as an acute reflection of people's feelings of deep psychological angst in the face of the formidable challenges confronting us, individually and collectively. "Fasten your seat belts!"

The world will surely not end the way the Bible tells us in its final pages. Think about it! In Revelations 19, 20, 21 and 22, the Bible basically says almost everyone except blind believers will be cast into a lake of fire burning with brimstone, and then a holy city will come down from God in heaven, and this city will have curiously cubic dimensions and 12 foundations "garnished with all manner of precious stones", and the foundations will support a great wall with 12 gates, and no one will be allowed to enter this holy city who "maketh a lie", excepting, I imagine, the apparently ardent and manipulative numerologists who proclaimed the words of these overly wrought Revelations to be an absolute truth.

It is much more likely that, if we fail to courageously heed the understandings related to factors assessed in the Sustainability Index, human activities will cause terrible and extensive damages to the natural ecosystems on our providential home planet, and millions of species of life will be driven to eternal extinction. This unraveling of the health of the terrestrial biosphere will pose a dire threat to our own continued existence. God will not be the cause of this damage and danger; it will be caused by us truly, *Homo sapiens*. Since "*Homo sapiens*" means "wise humankind", it would be auspicious for us to <u>wise up</u> and succeed in collaborating together enough to definitively improve the prospects of our long-term thriving and survival.

Thomas Paine honorably declared, "If there must be trouble, let it be in my day, that my child may have peace."

<u>A Matter of Debate</u>

The carrying capacity of the Earth for our kind has been the subject of contentious debate ever since political economist Robert Thomas Malthus speculated that the number of human beings alive would inevitably grow faster than our ability to produce food to sustain them. It was 222 years ago in the year 1800 when Malthus made this prediction, at a time when the human population on the planet was only 1 billion. Malthus sensibly asserted that human numbers were subject to constraints similar to every other kind of animal, and that

eventually we would be unable to feed our growing numbers. Malthus would no doubt have been incapable of imagining that the average human life spans would double in the two centuries after he lived, intensifying the demands that humanity would place on natural resources, or that the carrying capacity equation would be further complicated by significant increases in per capita amounts of resources used, on average, by every person. He also could not have been able to anticipate how successful a Green Revolution would be in developing an industrial agriculture system that would produce a vastly expanded harvest of food.

Malthus would likely have supposed that the human population would never reach 8 billion people, but sure enough, our numbers will soon exceed that total. Malthus was more-or-less wrong, right? Not so fast! Malthus did have a valid point. It is crazy to deny this. Every species of life is constrained by limiting factors that include food supply, fresh water availability, competitive forces, and vulnerability to diseases or harsh weather events or catastrophic changes.

A quietly sensational story about an introduced population of reindeer on St. Matthew Island in the Bering Sea cautions us to pay close attention. A biologist named David R. Klein tells this thought-provoking story about a spike and then crash of this population of reindeer. The U.S. Coast Guard had released 29 reindeer on St. Matthew Island in 1944 to provide a potential "roaming food source" for military personnel stationed in this remote area during World War II. The Coast Guard left the island soon after the war ended, so it was "a fine situation for the animals at first -- their only predators had disappeared, leaving them on a 32-mile long and four-mile wide island rich with their favorite food, lichens." The numbers of reindeer began to increase steadily. Within 20 years, there were more than 6,000 animals on the island. By then, the reindeer had severely depleted the supply of food, and all but 42 of them died off during a severe winter in 1964. Eventually these reindeer too died out, and there are no longer any reindeer on the island.

The carrying capacity of St. Matthew Island for reindeer was obviously not 6,000, even though it had reached that number at its peak. This casts a bright light on the notion that there is likely a carrying capacity of island Earth for our ingenious kind. There are already an estimated 800 million people in the world who suffer from hunger and malnutrition, and more than 7.5 million persons die of hunger or hunger-related causes every year, so we are obviously pushing our luck by banking on there being no depletionary threat or harsh climate event that will batter food production in the future. Precautionary principles and reasonable foresight counsel us to take bold measures to limit our population growth to avoid increasing the risks of a tragic crash in our numbers.

What the future holds is uncertain. The depletion of resources like topsoil, fresh water, phosphate fertilizers, and fossil fuels will make things much more challenging. Risks related to industrial monoculture agriculture and diminishing crop diversity will get worse, and vulnerabilities will increase due to species extinctions being caused by human activities. Since anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere are having the effect of altering normal temperature, precipitation and storm patterns worldwide, Mother Earth seems to be developing a fever. The famous Hippocratic Oath of physicians suggests that a doctor should "First, do no harm." We are all doctors here; and we all need to see the biggest possible picture of ecological well-being.

Crusade for a Transcendentally Good Cause

The long run is not far off, and it seems to have suffered a kind of foreshortening effect as the pace of civilization has sped up with the advent of the Industrial Revolution -- and as a rapid acceleration has taken place in the last century in the exploitation of Earth's renewable and non-renewable resources. NOW is the time for clearer foresight, and for us to take safer and more sensible courses of action.

The central idea assessed by the 45 measures in this Index is how humanity is faring in the struggle to make our societies into thriving and sustainable concerns rather than ones suffering deteriorating declines. The objectively reasonable assumptions made in this Index have been chosen to reflect transcendent ecological truths. They are the context of our future -- and a rough outline of the defining influences of our destiny. A clear comprehension of the categories analyzed in this Index reveals a good case for us to collectively choose to make bold course corrections in our societies, as advocated in many of the recommendations in this manifesto.

Conservatives tend to simplistically claim we can only solve our national and global problems by shrinking the size of the federal government -- to the point of "drowning it in the bathtub" -- and by giving the "free market" and wealthy people and giant corporations and religious authorities more power and influence. There are cogently convincing reasons to doubt these contentions, as explored extensively throughout this manifesto. Conservatives have been hijacked by shrewd operatives who are basically advocating that we allow rich people to grab more power to rig economic and political systems in the U.S., and abroad, even more to their extremely narrow advantage, an outcome achieved to the calamitous disadvantage of billions of people.

Liberals tend to say that corporations and religious establishments are highly undemocratic, and that our best hope is to seek governance by honest, wise, broad-minded and democratically elected leaders who will be able to manage our economic systems more effectively and more fairly, and with better far-sighted intention. These progressive-minded people sensibly maintain that the best hope for humanity will be found in solving problems together and finding a consensus oriented toward making the world a truly better place.

> 'Tis not the concern of a day, a year, or an age; posterity are virtually involved in the contest, and will be more or less affected, even to the end of time, by the proceedings now."
>
> --- Thomas Paine

A Call for Peaceable Revolution

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke on April 4th, 1967, one year to the day before he was assassinated in Memphis, and he delivered inspiring words of wisdom that echo from those days down to our own strife-torn times with ringing and reverberating relevance:

> "I am convinced that if we are to get on the right side of the world revolution, we as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values. We must rapidly begin the shift from a "thing-oriented" society to a "person-oriented" society. When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, extreme materialism and militarism are incapable of being conquered. True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar. It comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring."
>
> "A true revolution of values will soon look uneasily on the glaring contrast of poverty and wealth with righteous indignation. It will look across the seas and see individual capitalists of the West investing huge sums of money in Asia, Africa and South America, only to take the profits out with no concern for the social betterment of the countries, and say, 'This is not just.' It will look at our alliance with the landed gentry of South America and say, 'This is not just.' The Western arrogance of feeling that it has everything to teach others and nothing to learn from them is not just."
>
> "A true revolution of values will lay a hand on the world order, and say of war, 'This way of settling differences is not just.' This business of burning human beings with napalm, of filling our nation's homes with orphans and widows, of injecting poisonous drugs of hate into the veins of peoples normally humane, of sending men home from dark and bloody battlefields physically handicapped and psychologically deranged, cannot be reconciled with wisdom, justice and love. A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death."
>
> "America, the richest and most powerful nation in the world, can well lead the way in this revolution of values. There is nothing ... to prevent us from reordering our priorities, so that the pursuit of peace will take precedence over the pursuit of war."
>
> "Since I am a preacher by trade, I suppose it is not surprising that I have seven major reasons for bringing Vietnam into the field of my moral vision. There is at the outset a very obvious and almost facile connection between the war in Vietnam and the struggle I, and others, have been waging in America. A few years ago there was a shining moment in that struggle. It seemed as if there was a real promise of hope for the poor, both black and white, through the (Lyndon Johnson) poverty program. There were experiments, hopes, new beginnings. Then came the buildup in Vietnam and I watched the program broken and eviscerated, as if it were some idle political plaything of a society gone mad on war, and I knew that America would never invest

the necessary funds or energies in rehabilitation of its poor so long as adventures like Vietnam continued to draw men and skills and money like some demonic destructive suction tube. So I was increasingly compelled to see the war as an enemy of the poor, and to attack it as such."

It is notable that worse toxins have been injected into our blood stream as trickle-down Big Lies and "the war on terror" and the "war on drugs" have led the United States to become a profligate spender on the military, and a more inequitable country, and a highly unjust *Incarceration Nation.*

Martin Luther King concluded his 1967 speech: "Our only hope today lies in our ability to recapture the revolutionary spirit and go out into a sometimes hostile world declaring eternal hostility to poverty, racism, and militarism. With this powerful commitment we shall boldly challenge the status quo and unjust mores, and thereby speed the day when 'every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain.'"

Real good leadership involves a willingness to honestly address difficult issues, and not to merely kick the can down the road. We can do better. We must do better. People of the world, unite! Let's resolve to make the near future a time of Progressive Economic Populist Awareness -- and of Peaceful Populist Egalitarian Deep Ecological Revolutionary Change!

Truly,

Dr. Tiffany B. Twain January 1, 2023
Feedback? Contact me at SaveTruffulaTrees@hotmail.com

Postscript: HISTORICAL RECORD OF CHANGES MADE IN ASSESSMENTS:

Factor 24. Worse evaluation, December 2012. Heat waves in the summers of 2011 and 2012 set record hot temperatures in thousands of locations across the United States and around the world, and when Superstorm Sandy struck one week before the presidential election in November 2012, it became the second most costly natural disaster in U.S. history after Hurricane Katrina. Total 101 → 100.

Factor 8. Worse evaluation, May 2013. The concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere reached 400 ppm for the first time in human history. Geologic evidence indicates that the last time the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere was this high was some 3 million years ago. The resulting overall global warming trend is altering normal weather patterns around the planet, upsetting crop production and causing severe storms, floods, heat waves, droughts, wildfires and even record snowfalls and cold snaps in some locales. Total → 99.

Factor 22. Better evaluation, October 2014. The unemployment rate in the U.S. dropped below 6% from a high that exceeded 10% in 2009. Caveat: the real inflation-adjusted median family income continues to decline. Then, Better evaluation, July 2018 when the unemployment rate in the U.S. fell below 4%, though underemployment and inequities in compensation continue at extreme levels. Then, much worse with the global pandemic beginning in early 2020.

Factor 39. Worse evaluation, November 2014. The victory of Republican politicians in the Nov. 2014 national elections who deny the disrupting impacts on the global climate of burning fossil fuels, and who pander obsequiously to big corporations, bodes ill for cooperation in addressing crucial environmental issues.

Factor 14. Worse evaluation, January 2015. The latest version of the Living Planet Index (2012) declared that there has been a stunning 52% decline in the number of mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians and fish around the globe in the past 40 years alone (from 1970 to 2010). This is bad news -- and has gotten worse.

** Factor 38. Better evaluation, January 2016, when the Paris Climate Accords made a considerably big step forward in international cooperation to help reduce climate-altering greenhouse gas emissions -- AND then downgraded again to a worser evaluation in January 2017 after the election of Trump and his moves to put climate change deniers in charge of the EPA and reverse progress on reducing carbon emissions.

Factor 41. Worse evaluation, June 2016. Concentrated wealth in the hands of billionaires has been radically increasing, and this is critically tainting our national priorities and decision-making, as revealed by Donald

Trump's ascendancy and Jane Mayer's incisive investigative journalism in her sensational book *Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Radical Right*.

Factor 36. Worse evaluation, December 2017. Republicans rammed through debt-financed regressive tax cuts without any input from Democrats, and are abusing their power by refusing to compromise. A ruthless casino capitalist corporatocracy has gained control of the government in the USA and is exerting abusive domineering power in nations worldwide, undermining hopes for good comprehensive solutions to the big challenges facing humanity. Exacerbated in 2020, with Trump impeachment proceedings and broad abuses of power undermining democratic fairness and national security.

Factor 31. Much worse June 2020, due to onset and worsening of the cataclysmic global pandemic.

The footnotes below provide more information about assumptions and assessments made related to Factor 8 – Climate Change and Factor 12 – Ecological Footprint.

Footnote 1 (re: Factor 8). Bill McKibben is the founder of 350.org, an international organization that is striving to get people worldwide to limit climate-disrupting greenhouse gas emissions. McKibben's primary premise is that a carbon dioxide concentration in the atmosphere exceeding a safe level of 350 ppm will cause dangerous disruptions to global weather patterns. As this gaseous concentration continues increasing, risks are growing and damages are burgeoning. The carbon dioxide concentration was about 394 ppm when this Index was first published in July 2011, and it first exceeded 400 ppm in May 2013. Greenhouse gas emissions associated with the burning of fossil fuels and animal husbandry have caused this concentration to increase every year since 1958, as confirmed by measurements done high atop the Mauna Loa volcano on the Big Island of Hawaii in the remote reaches of the Pacific Ocean. Widespread logging is exacerbating this problem by impairing the rainforest "lungs of the planet" that serve to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere through the vital process of photosynthesis. The *Merchants of Doubt* cannot be allowed to deny this evidence and to cultivate doubts that help prevent constructive actions that could deal effectively with this exceedingly serious issue.

I encourage readers to review the Keeling Curve online for impressive information on the precise measurements involved in this understanding. These indicators reveal that the concentration of carbon dioxide in Earth's atmosphere has reached a level today that is more than 25% higher than carbon dioxide levels anytime in the last 800,000 years. Scientists have made this determination by drilling cores from ice sheets in Antarctica and analyzing carbon dioxide bubbles trapped in the ice during past millennia and eons.

The Sustainability Index assumes the following:

Carbon dioxide below 350 ppm = Sustainable for an indefinite period of time (5)
Carbon dioxide at 350 to 399 ppm = Sustainable if immediate remediate reforms are made (4)
Carbon dioxide at 400 to 450 ppm = Unsustainable, but remediable with concerted efforts (3)
Carbon dioxide at 451 to 500 ppm = Unsustainable, and requiring major changes (2)
Carbon dioxide above 500 ppm = Definitively unsustainable and highly disruptive (1)

Footnote 2 (re: Factor 12). The Average Carbon Footprint of all people on Earth indicates that we would need 1.5 planet Earths to sustain current levels of production and consumption. If everyone consumed at the profligate per capita rate that people in the U.S. do, more than 5 planet Earths would be needed. There is of course only one Earth to provide for us.

The Sustainability Index assumes the following:

Global need for 1 planet Earth = Sustainable for an indefinite period of time (5)
Global need for 1 - 1.5 planet Earths = Sustainable if far-reaching reforms are made (4)
Global need for 1.5 - 2 planet Earths = Unsustainable; remediable with concerted efforts (3)
Global need for 2 - 3 planet Earths = Unsustainable, and requiring radical changes (2)
Global need for 3+ planet Earths = Definitively unsustainable and inevitably disruptive

One Dozen Big Initiatives to Positively Transform Our Societies

Earth Manifesto proposals by Dr. Tiffany B. Twain
October 2017, with updates in through June 21, 2020

Professor Jared Diamond made a valuable observation in his insightful book *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed.* He wrote that we need a paradigm shift in how our leaders think and act. America needs leaders with "the courage to practice long-term thinking and make bold, courageous, anticipatory decisions at a time when problems become perceptible, but before they reach crisis proportions." We should rightly give stronger support to honest and effective leaders who will act accordingly!

We need leaders who are sane, decent, compassionate, responsible and committed to leaving a healthier legacy of a sustainable future for our children and theirs, and theirs, for countless generations to come. We need good leaders who understand human nature and motivations and needs, and who work with this knowledge to achieve greater good goals. Even before the pandemic, humanity has been facing an existential crisis in the world due to a convergence of serious challenges that include the inexorable exhaustion of natural resources, the encroaching condition of a diminishing carrying capacity of the Earth to provide for a human population approaching 8 billion persons, millions of species of life being threatened with eternal extinction, the global climate being dangerously destabilized, and other adversities being caused by ecological overshoot by our needy and greedy kind.

When good sense prevails, moderate leaders pass fair-minded reforms, but when rashly uncompromising courses are pursued, bitter discord can result in protracted class conflicts and serious civil strife. Recognizing that a greater modicum of social justice is required to improve social cohesion and create more peaceable coexistence, the twelve detailed proposals that follow should be formalized by our representatives to create a healthier, more secure and more sustainable society. These are, in effect, needed social insurance policies that are surprisingly affordable -- and vastly preferable to stimulated inequality, antagonistic conflict and chaotic instability.

The gap between the wealthiest Americans and the poorest is wider in the USA today than it has been since the Roaring Twenties or the tawdry Gilded Age before it, with their excessive conspicuous consumption and greedy robber barons. The richest 20 Americans have more wealth right now than the bottom 50% combined, and the top 1% owns more wealth than the bottom 90%. *The Lessons of History* teach us that such a condition of really excessive concentrated wealth creates an increasingly critical situation that should be addressed by enacting laws that make our society significantly fairer. Otherwise, social strife and revolutionary fervor will likely create a redistribution of poverty and insecurity for all, according to the philosophic historians Will and Ariel Durant.

Laudable pro-democracy movements since colonial days around the world have given broader freedoms to billions of people, and it is sad that ambitious and corrupt politicians are now trying to drive this movement in reverse. It is becoming too risky to allow politics-as-usual to be perpetuated without far-reaching reforms, or to accept any further steps backwards. What the world really needs now is farsighted, forward thinking and inclusive-minded collaborative problem solving, not leaders who exploit anti-immigrant sentiments and engage in emotion-hijacking fear-mongering demagoguery to gain and abuse power in ways that are deceitful, discriminatory, anti-egalitarian, retrogressive and repressive. We should strongly support representatives who champion truly civilizing forces of fair trade, democratic governance and fair-minded principles, and reject leaders who are dangerously reactive

and authoritarian. There are already far too many plutocratic and oligarchic, totalitarian and dictatorial governments ruling in countries around the planet, like in Russia, Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Syria, the Philippines, China, India, Poland, Hungary -- and the United States.

These proposals are set forth to honor the hopes and prospects of humankind for fairer and saner societies. These ideas would help create a real Better Deal that would make all Americans more secure, and would work better for all, not just those who are the most privileged. These ideas should be regarded as well-considered ideas of a relatively objective observer, and a providential example of the "straggling thoughts of individuals" that Thomas Paine referred to when he offered his cogent ideas in *Common Sense,* as the basis for wise and able leaders to use in creating a fairer new form of governance.

These plans are particularly important in the USA today due to the terribly backwards, anti-progressive, anti-Black, anti-egalitarian and anti-inclusive directions in which our corrupt "conservative" leaders are driving us.

To Do the Right Thing, or Not To Do the Right Thing, THAT is the Question!

> "Independence is my happiness, and I view things as they are, without regard to place or person; my country is the world, *and my religion is to do good."*
>
> --- Thomas Paine

1. MIDDLE CLASS FAIRNESS. Strengthen and expand the middle class and improve opportunities for social mobility. To do this, commitments should be renewed to policies that benefit the majority of people, not just policies that mostly benefit rich people. The health and well-being of the middle class and the poor have been significantly undermined in recent decades by unfairly regressive tax and spending policies. To strengthen this vital segment of American society, we must once again implement strategies that helped build the middle class in the first place: (a) govern Big Business so that it primarily benefits "We the People", not just CEOs, investors and wealthy people; (b) create a social safety net of universal healthcare, and reduce the severe inequities that currently exist in medical care; (c) enact and enforce laws that give workers more influence in their struggle against the abuses of capital; (d) make higher education more affordable for everyone by providing cheaper financing and an expansive program similar to the G.I. Bill after World War II; (e) invest more money in improving our nation's crumbling physical infrastructure, and less in a bloated military; (f) restore taxation that is more progressively structured; and (g) provide for a true Social Security retirement insurance program that protects retirees from having their payroll taxes squandered by the government.

To finance this providential plan, assess a 2020 Excess Profits Tax on every company making more than 112% of the profits they made last year. Design the plan with steeply graduated rates. This will help ensure that we do not treat people in the future "meanly and pitifully", as Thomas Paine put it in *Common Sense by* "running the next generation into debt" to solve the problems of today. This would make the plan truly fiscally responsible.

2. CLIMATE ACTION PLAN. Implement an immediately effective Climate Action Plan to address the unfolding climate crisis by reducing emissions of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Assess a Pigouvian Green Fee of $1 per gallon on every gallon of gasoline sold. Design this Green Fee on usages of fossil fuels so that it will gain broadly-based support by because it is progressive, beneficially egalitarian and eminently fair. Ensure that this will actually make the bottom half of people in our society a bit better off financially, through fee-and-dividend provisions. This Green Fee plan will thus avoid opposition to increased fuel taxes like that experienced in France by people in the Yellow Vest movement.

Use some of the money generated to invest in cleaner energy alternatives, which fortuitously happen to be indefinitely renewable instead of being limited in global reserves and tragically harmful in use.

This fee-and-dividend feature could resemble that proposed by the Citizens Climate Lobby, which would make the bottom 50% of the populace better off with the dividends they will receive in excess of the cost of carbon taxes incurred for an average usage of gasoline. Also dedicate funding for relief and recovery efforts from natural disasters around the globe that are becoming more and more costly as increasing numbers of people are in harms way, and as more extreme weather events are taking place with increasing frequency, intensity and disastrous potential, due to the destabilizing impacts of atmospheric greenhouse gases on the global climate and

communities worldwide.

This plan will serve providential purposes and have a dramatic positive effect by reducing the use of fossil fuels because the higher cost of oil will stimulate large investments in conservation, improved energy efficiency and clean energy alternatives. If such a plan had been put into effect in 2016, it would have raised about $125 billion on the 3.2 trillion vehicle miles driven in the U.S. (in total during the year), assuming an average mileage of 25 mpg. The projected $125 billion in revenues generated from this green fee should be allocated as follows:

(2A) Give a new tax credit of $500 per household to everyone filing a tax return that has a net income of less than $75,000. This allowance will offset the higher cost of gasoline for these people to drive 12,000 miles per year at an average 25 miles per gallon, plus a $100 bonus for supporting the implementation of this new Good Deal plan. For those who don't drive, or drive less than 12,000 miles per year, or get better gas mileage, then "bully for you"! Keep the tax credit, and thanks from everyone for contributing less to traffic woes and excessive emissions. Annual allocation: $50 billion.

(2B) Invest enough money in carbon-offset programs to make the USA carbon neutral for all miles driven each year. It will cost just 9 cents of the $1 Green Fee per gallon for the USA to go "carbon neutral" by investing in carbon-offset programs. This will help the USA move toward independence from its addiction to the finite existing amounts of non-renewable fossil fuels, which happen to be odiously polluting when burned, in addition to being climate destabilizing. Model this program on the outstanding organization Cool Effect, which that offers a dozen specific carbon reduction projects around the world, some of which have marvelous win/win collateral outcomes such as dramatically improving the respiratory health of thousands of appreciative people in Uganda who are given cleaner energy cook stoves for preparing their meals. Annual allocation: $12 billion.

(2C) Make investments in good public transportation, clean energy innovation, and subsidized international sharing of the latest and best technologies for renewable energy alternatives and reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, along with better protections of tropical and temperate forests worldwide. Invest $12 billion each year under this program.

(2D) Make contributions to a Climate Disaster Relief Fund and the Green Climate Fund to pay for some of the costs of weather-related disasters both in the U.S. and abroad, as advocated by the "Group of 77" developing nations (established in 1964 -- it currently includes 135 countries). Poor countries in the developing world have a persuasive argument when they assert that richer developed nations have a moral obligation to shoulder more of the costs of extreme hardships being suffered due to climate disasters in their countries. These natural disasters include more powerful hurricanes, typhoons and tornadoes, torrential rains, coastal flooding, heat waves, disappearing arable lands, intensifying wildfires, and expanding desertification. Rich countries, after all, have spewed the most emissions into the atmosphere in the last 150 years, and thereby have contributed most to the accelerating climate crisis. Invest $40 billion each year in this program.

(2E) Increase U.S. investments in humanitarian foreign aid, and in international family planning programs and women's health clinics worldwide. Invest $12 billion each year in these programs. Cost summary:

Green Fee Investment Recap

Tax credits to offset higher gasoline taxes	$ 50 billion
Carbon offsets to make the USA carbon neutral for all vehicles	12 billion
Investments in green technologies and reforestation	12 billion
Weather disaster relief funding for people in communities worldwide	40 billion
Foreign aid, family planning programs and women's health clinics	12 billion
Total (rounded)	$ 125 billion

3. FAIR TAXATION INITIATIVE. Give every taxpayer a tax cut on their first $75,000 of income by making our system of taxation more steeply graduated. Offset the reduced revenues caused by this change with increases in taxes on all higher levels of income. In keeping with the sensible compromise of the wise ancient

Greek lawmaker Solon, the incomes of the wealthiest people should be taxed at rates that are 12 times the rates on the lowest income taxpayers. Calibrate this reform to ensure that it generates enough revenue to balance the budget and not add to the national debt in normal non-pandemic years.

It should be recognized that lower tax rates on the first $75,000 of net income for every taxpayer are very fair because they give tax cuts to each and every taxpayer. The rates on incomes over $151,900 that are proposed below are higher, but they are still a relatively good deal for high-income earners, considering that the top rate was at least 70% for every single year from 1936 to 1981. During that period, broadly shared prosperity prevailed, and the rate of economic growth was much higher than in the years since then. This may be a surprise, and it refutes the trickle-down propaganda that rationalizes regressive changes in taxes as being desirable because they supposedly contribute to stronger economic growth. (The top tax rate in 1980 was 70% on all incomes over $600,000 in current dollars. The lower 60% rate proposed below generously applies only on incomes over $25 million.)

These egalitarian changes in tax tables could be called the **Social Justice Taxation Act.** Here is a providential recommendation for this restructuring of income tax rates:

Taxable Income	2016 Federal Tax Rates on Net Income *	Proposed 2020 Federal Tax Rates on Net Income *	Net Change
$ 0 to $ 18,550	10%	5%	Lower by 5%
$ 18,551 to $ 75,300	15%	12%	Lower by 3%
$ 75,301 to $ 151,900	25%	25%	Unchanged
$ 151,901 to $ 231,450	28%	30%	Higher by 2%
$ 231,451 to $ 250,000	33%	36%	Higher by 3%
$ 250,001 to $ 413,350	33%	38%	Higher by 5%
$ 413,351 to $ 466,950	35%	40%	Higher by 5%
$ 466,951 to $ 1,000,000	39.6%	45%	Higher by 5.4%
$ 1,000,000 to $ 25,000,000	39.6%	48%	Higher by 8.4%
$ 25,000,000 and above	39.6%	60%	Higher by 20.4%

* Note: These rates are for people who have the status of "Married, Filing Jointly". The Tax Tables should be adjusted in a consistent manner for all the current categories of taxpayers.

Taxes on capital gains and on heir's inheritances from rich parents should also be revised to be more steeply graduated. Here is an Estate Tax reform proposal: Allow a generous exclusion of a non-taxable amount for each estate of $2,500,000. For estates worth more than $2.5 million, a 30% tax should be assessed on the amount of estates between $2.5 million and $5 million, 40% on amounts between $5 million and $10 million, 50% on those amounts between $10 million and $25 million, and 60% on any amounts in excess of $25 million.

Three other strategies should be used to ensure that tax inequities are reduced, as adduced in *Three Bills of Right - A Triumvirate of Responsible Actions for the Greater Good.* These include: (1) the elimination of tax loopholes that allow giant corporations to evade tens of billions of dollars in U.S. federal income taxes each year; (2) a new requirement for hedge fund managers to finally pay taxes at regular rates instead of ridiculously low capital gains rates; and (3) a reduction in tax advantages that investors receive for dividend income and capital gains in excess of $12,000 in any given year.

This tax reform plan should be designed to result in a net increase in tax revenues that would generate $50 billion per year to be used to reduce social and environmental injustices that exist in our society today. Provisions should be included that will prevent costs from being externalized onto society that are creating terribly harmful environmental injustices against poor people and minority communities. Wasteful spending should be cut from the military budget, and anything suspiciously like price gouging contracting or crony

capitalist pork barrel spending should be better controlled. Corporate welfare subsidies should be eliminated, and bureaucratic red tape should be evaluated and streamlined, consistent with long-term greater good values.

4. ECOLOGICAL SANITY. Make a revolutionary commitment to sustainable existence and a better quality of life for people today and in the future. To accomplish this goal, a farsighted Ecological Balance Initiative should be enacted that gives higher priority to smart ideas like those articulated in *Three Bills of Right.*

5. ETHICAL POLITICS. Politicians and our government should be made more responsive to the needs of the people, and to the longer term greater good of the largest number of people over the longest period of time. One way to accomplish this would be to enact effective campaign finance reforms to reduce the corrupting influence of Big Money in our elections and in the lobbying of our representatives in Congress. We should put into effect publicly financed "Clean Money, Clean Election" legislation nationwide. Additionally, Congressional district lines for all gerrymandered districts should be redrawn by independent people or politically balanced commissions before the 2020 elections, because extreme gerrymandering in the 21st century has given unfair over-representation to conservative partisans who completely control the redistributing process in more than half the U.S. states. Such exercises of extreme partisanship in drawing gerrymandered congressional districts are done to disenfranchise the majority of Americans, so they are egregious abuses of power.

Truly bipartisan initiatives should be implemented to reduce the influence of *Dark Money* and institutionalized bribery. In addition, a far-reaching Government Ethics Act should be enacted to prevent politicians in Congress and the White House from engaging in shady dealings and conflicts of interest in our Crazytown capitol, with its unconscionably proliferating "culture of corruption". Perverse incentives and wrongheaded subsidies should be eliminated. The overarching power that big corporations have in Congress should be reduced, as advocated by the sensible Move to Amend Coalition. And the interests of workers, women, children, minorities, entrepreneurs, small businesses, and future generations should be more strongly protected.

Our American democracy should also be strengthened by ensuring greater media diversity, and by protecting voting rights, and by reducing influence-peddling scams and wanton profiteering schemes. Deceptive practices, rash risk-taking, favoritism for the rich, crony conspiracies, short-term-oriented profiteering, media manipulation, nepotism and outright fraud should be more effectively constrained.

6. CONSTITUTIONAL PROTECTIONS. Our Constitution and its checks and balances should be defended from excessive infringements by the Executive Branch. The responsibilities of Congress and the civil liberties of citizens must not be unreasonably curtailed by aggressive expansions in the power of the Presidency, and the current administration must be forced to comply with subpoenas.

Also, Congress should start abiding by the Constitution in matters of war, as set forth in Article I, Section 8, Clause 11, which gives Congress, and only Congress, the power to declare war. The President is not given this power; the Constitution gives the President the power to direct the military after Congress declares war, in the capacity of Commander-in-Chief. Congress has been derelict in its War Powers responsibility ever since the last time they actually did declare war, right after the Japanese attacks on Pearl Harbor. The good reason this provision was established by our Founders was to avoid undesirable foreign entanglements, and to ensure that the President does not get the country into a war without public debate or broad assessments of ramifications, consequences and risks. In our political duopoly system, our elected representatives have deferred to the president in many wars, like those in Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq, and done so out of expediency and cowardice, and for one overriding unprincipled principal purpose -- profiteering! Follow the money!!

Citizens should be assured of reasonable privacy protections, and unwarranted secrecy should yield to greater openness. Those who exploit public fears and anxieties to divide people, and who gain power using treacherous deceit and misleading propaganda, should not be allowed to rule despotically, or to suppress dissent. Rampant spying on the American people with warrantless monitoring of communications should be curtailed. Violations of international treaties on torture should be renounced, and any future uses of "extraordinary renditions" of prisoners to offshore prisons should be prohibited. Secret military tribunals, the abridgement of habeas corpus rights, the obstruction of oversight and investigations, and disdain for human rights should be circumvented, and the military prison at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba should be closed.

7. A VIBRANT AND SOUND ECONOMY. Protect the economy by sensibly regulating banks and the financial industry to prevent harms done by overly risky speculation, debt leveraging, corporate conglomeration, and unchecked conflicts of interest. It is high time that the unaccountable power of big corporate entities is more intelligently limited, and that loopholes are closed and deregulatory improprieties reversed that allow corporations to evade paying taxes and externalize costs and risks onto society. Broadly shared prosperity should be promoted, and effective steps should be taken to reduce the concentration of wealth and political power in the hands of the few. Stronger efforts should be made to prevent abuses of power and excessive privileges for insiders and cronies. Our leaders should adhere to economically sound policies, and adopt auspicious innovative ideas. Sensible public investments and greater transparency should be encouraged. Human concerns and ecological values, not profits alone, should be given serious consideration in all economic decisions.

The overarching goal of the economy should be economic justice and farsighted environmental policies and the sustainability of our aggregate activities. We should stop pandering so exclusively to wealthy people and CEOs, speculators, economic fundamentalists, the reactionary religious right, investors, war profiteers, polluters and stock market beneficiaries who often oppose common sense regulations, oversight and accountability. Trends in our society and government should be reversed when they create serious systemic risks, such as highly leveraged speculation, fraudulent swindles, fiscal irresponsibility, deceptive and discriminatory practices, dishonesty, and extreme partisanship. Government bailouts should be used only to safeguard the greater interests of the mainstream public, and not mainly the interests of investors and Wall Street banks. All economic stimulus and recovery efforts should contain just provisions and ecologically sound plans.

The practice of maximizing profits by externalizing costs onto society should be constrained to help prevent serious misallocations of resources. Here is a fair recommendation for how to immediately begin accounting for real costs that are being unfairly and irresponsibly externalized onto society. An estimated $400 billion in costs are being incurred in the U.S. every year related to pollution, respiratory diseases (before COVID-19), toxic wastes, harms to the environment, and natural disasters like intensifying storms, heat waves, wildfires, flooding and crop failures -- which are being made worse by global warming-exacerbated changes in natural weather patterns. This $400 billion represents about 2% of the annual U.S. Gross Domestic Product.

Proposal: Establish a Future Viability Assessment on all products and services. This action would require real costs to be included where they should properly be reflected. This should be done on a progressive scale with higher assessments for polluting industries that are involved in unsustainable practices, and lower assessments for greener industries. All industries should be classified by a panel of independent-minded economists according to the degree the industries contribute to unsustainable production and consumption. For instance, the most polluting industries should be required to pay a 4% assessment, while the greenest industries would be charged a 0% assessment. Deal with the regressive impact of resulting price inflation on people who are least able to afford it by partially offsetting the higher costs by giving a new $300 tax credit annually to every American taxpayer. This would offset the 2% higher costs on every taxpayer's first $15,000 of spending.

Use the funds generated from this Future Viability Assessment to invest in pollution prevention and mitigation activities, cleaning-up pollution and toxic wastes, covering medical costs related to asthma and other health adversities caused by environmental damages, and making efforts to mitigate costs associated with climate change impacts and correlated natural disasters. Also, create more robust protections of forests, wetlands, rivers, oceans, coral reef communities, fresh water resources, National Parks, open spaces and wilderness areas.

8. BALANCED BUDGETS INITIATIVE. Stop the federal government from recklessly indulging in the short-term expediency of borrowing enormous amounts of money to squander it on tax breaks for rich people, ramping up military spending, financing pandemic relief measures and bailing out big businesses. Make a binding commitment to reduce the spiraling use of debt, and to stop the lavish waste of taxpayer funds and borrowed money. To achieve this positive goal, a new mechanism should be established that that will be effective in discouraging our expedient inclination to live beyond our means. We should create a Fiscal Responsibility Act that will force lawmakers and the executive branch to set honest priorities and end shortsighted government "borrow-and-spend" tactics that result in wasteful spending on pork barrel-like projects or misguided subsidies and socially irresponsible profiteering, as well as on wars of aggression and unaffordable entitlements.

The following five-year plan is proposed to begin on January 1, 2021, as clarity over pandemic debt comes into focus. This plan would be effective because it would give powerful motives to the primary deciders in our system -- wealthy people and big corporations -- to support annual budgets that are more nearly balanced. This plan should be implemented gradually over the next four fiscal years according to a fair methodology: Require Big Businesses and the highest income earners to be assessed for federal deficits at the end of every fiscal year. For the fiscal year running from October 1, 2020 to September 30, 2021, assess 25% of any federal budget deficit as follows: half of this obligation will be assessed to businesses that earn net incomes of more than $1 million, and the other half will be assessed to individuals with taxable incomes above $1 million. Allocate these assessments on a progressive scale with higher percentages for higher incomes. Then, in the following fiscal year, assess 50% of any deficits using the same methodology; and in the year after that, assess 75%, and then 100% of any such deficits.

This plan will give the powerful vested interests that have been primary beneficiaries of the short-term-oriented and irresponsible expediency of mortgaging the future for narrow benefits a powerful motive to step forward to make our system eminently fairer. This plan would cause these interest groups to shift from supporting deficit spending to finding much better ways of balancing government revenues and spending, and would topple the hegemony of power-abusers vested in the current status quo.

9. WAR AND PEACE. Only with truer justice will we have greater peace, at home and abroad. Our political representatives should courageously commit the United States to peaceful diplomatic resolutions of conflicts between all nations in the world. We need to pursue foreign policies that enhance mutual security for all, and that respect the sovereignty of other nations. We should reject wars for oil and other resources. Effective ways should be found to prevent military aggression, preemptive warfare and endless military occupations of other countries. Policy deciders should be prevented from waging wars to divert attention and money from domestic problems. We can't allow power to be rashly abused under the guise of a misleading and false national security. The use of sovereignty-violating unmanned drone aircraft armed with Hellfire missiles should be more strictly restrained. These supersonic missiles strike targets before the sound of their approach reaches their victims, and kill many innocent persons.

General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the war hero of World War II and U.S. President from 1956 to 1961, warned Americans about the military-industrial complex and the "disastrous rise of misplaced power". He emphatically and wisely counseled: "Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals, so that security and liberty may prosper together." Security and liberty prospering together is good!

Full funding should be restored to State Department diplomacy missions, and a Cabinet-level Department of Peace should be created to promote collaborative problem solving and smart statesmanship on the international stage. This would help responsibly resolve current armed conflicts and prevent ones in the future. Stronger international institutions, agreements and laws should be supported to prevent wars, torture and genocide.

A summit of Middle East countries should be convened to develop good ways for solving conflicts in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan and Yemen so as to be likely to ensure that these nations do not become failed states. A bold new plan should be developed to guarantee a safe homeland for Palestinians, and to make sure peaceful coexistence with Israel is assured. An initiative should be launched to reduce the influence of radical extremism and reactionary fundamentalism in religions worldwide. International social justice, sustainable development and human rights should be promoted as top priorities, along with these proposed peace-building initiatives. Significant taxes should be levied on all sales of guns, ammunition and military weapons, with funds generated by these taxes to be used to create fairer societies and to engage in proactive peace-building programs.

10. HONEST ACCOUNTING. Require the General Accounting Office to improve internal controls and accounting and reporting practices, with the goal of having an unqualified audit opinion rendered on the federal government to Congress and the American people. This audit opinion should certify that the financial statements of the federal government are fairly stated in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles. In connection with this audit, the GAO (or newly-created civil Grand Juries of distinguished and

responsible citizens) should be empowered to make recommendations designed to make government spending -- and Defense Department spending in particular -- better controlled and more frugal, honest and accountable.

11. FAIR AND EQUAL HUMAN RIGHTS. Ratify the Equal Rights Amendment to give equal rights to women and men. The ERA was first proposed in 1923, and was once ratified by 35 of the necessary 38 states (3/4 of the 50 states). This cornerstone of fairness should be incorporated into our great U.S. Constitution. Likewise, a new Constitutional Amendment should be created to give gay men and lesbian women fairer treatment, equal civil rights, and reasonable protections under the law. And sensible and comprehensive immigration reforms should be formulated instead of politicizing the issue. And the Constitution should be strengthened to make clear our common agreement that no Church should be able to impose its parochial dogmas on society, and that the First Amendment guarantees are strongly established that ensure a separation between Church and State.

12. POPULATION GROWTH. One of the fundamental contributing factors to all our social and environmental problems, and to many of the conflicts in the world, is the surging number of human beings on Earth. Global human population growth needs to be reduced from its current net increase of more than 70 million people every year. To accomplish this, we should provide free contraceptives to women everywhere who want them, including emergency "morning after pills", so that the incidence of both unwanted pregnancies and abortions will be reduced. Better education is needed, along with expanded opportunities for girls and women worldwide. Women's healthcare clinics should be established and generously funded. Initiatives like this would have a great humanitarian collateral benefit of reducing cervical cancer and the transmission of sexually-transmitted diseases like AIDS. Steps should be taken to ensure that the 'Global Gag Rule' never again restricts U.S. support for family planning programs abroad, and the U.S. should double its modest annual contributions to the United Nations Population Fund. Women should be guaranteed the right to make their own personal reproductive choices. Women who do not want children must not be forced to have them. To codify this fair-minded goal, an Amendment to the U.S. Constitution should be enacted that establishes reproductive rights for women, and follows the practical precedent of unrestricted rights for a safe abortion during the first trimester of any pregnancy, as set forth by the Supreme Court in the *Roe vs. Wade* decision in 1973.

Concluding Commentary

To accomplish these twelve big initiatives, *We the People* must demand new political leaders who act as broad-minded, reasonable and honorable representatives of the broadest interests of the American people. Politicians should be expected to keep the best interests of all people foremost in mind in every policy-making consideration. Effective changes need to be made to our political system to staunch the excessive influence of Big Money, and of public trust-betraying wealthy "conservatives". We must take back control of our government from those who represent outsized privileges for rich people, CEOs, war profiteers, polluters, deceitful demagogues, and the reactionary religious right. We should rightly honor and demand greater honesty, and deny power to Machiavellian politicians who intentionally lie to people for personal gain, and who stoke their insecurities, amp up their resentments and take unfair advantage of their fears. We should choose leaders who promote policies that are fiscally responsible and more egalitarian, and who oppose discrimination against people in minority groups, or who espouse exceedingly harsh approaches to vulnerable immigrants and asylum seekers. These leaders should honestly avoid authoritarian abuses of power and unjust military interventions, and reject ecologically unwise courses of action.

When many of these words were first written, this last paragraph concluded, "Specifically, Donald Trump and his grotesque tactics should be soundly defeated in his bid for power in the November 2016 elections." In the chaotic aftermath of the illegitimate Trump/Pence coup, responsible and patriotic folks should now join together to remove from office all the anti-progressive, anti-egalitarian, anti-democratic and anti-environmental politicians in Congress and in the Executive branch of government.

Truly, Dr. Tiffany B. Twain

Happy Harbingers in Good Ideas for a Better Future

An Earth Manifesto publication by Dr. Tiffany B. Twain
Begun in 2012, sporadically updated through Nov. 1, 2022

Welcome to the Earth Manifesto. My name is Tiffany Twain, and this is my story.

I fancy myself the great-granddaughter of the legendary American character Mark Twain. It has been a well-kept secret that my mother, Nina Clemens Gabrilowitsch, gave birth to out-of-wedlock twins in 1950 after a passionate love affair in Hollywood, California. Nina named us love children Tiffany and Tom. My mother Nina was the only child of Mark Twain's second daughter, Clara Clemens. The year before Mark Twain died in 1910, Clara had married Ossip Gabrilowitsch, a world-renowned Russian-American pianist, and they had spent many years in Germany and New York City before they moved to Michigan, where Ossip became the long-tenured conductor of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra.

With all the travels that my mother Nina had done with her parents as a youngster, Ossip had nicknamed her "the International Monkey". My clever brother Tom and I have done a lot of travel ourselves, and we have seen a good part of the world and its ways. It helps to have inherited a small portion of Mark Twain's estate, since this boon has allowed us to lead quite charmed and interesting lives. Our father Jules brought us up, mainly because our mother Nina had slipped into a serious dependence on alcohol and drugs in the last decade of her life, before she died way too young at the age of 55. Clara Clemens' second husband Jacques Samossoud helped us out with money from time to time during our childhood. It was one of the best things he did in his life, and like Huck Finn's Pap, the town drunk, there were not all that many! He may have been trying to make up for his reckless gambling, a bad habit that resulted in his squandering of most of the income Clara had received from Mark Twain's estate.

I have always loved dramatic mountains like the Himalayas, the Andes, the Rockies, the Cascades and the Sierra Nevada, as well as lovely coastlines, but I occasionally visit "America's Hometown" in Hannibal, Missouri, to re-invigorate my connection to my great-grandfather's riparian literary roots. Visualize yourself there with me, high atop Lover's Leap on the west side of the Mississippi River and just south of Hannibal's town limits. As we look intently upriver from this promontory, let's settle in to a reflective mood and think about all the news and big issues of the day, and the important things in life. And imagine taking the time to appreciate the wonderfully vitalizing views of the natural world from any of a countless number of beautiful vantage points like this.

My story is largely one of an almost evangelical dedication to clear thinking and open-minded exploration of Big Picture ideas and the greater good of human societies. Doggone those conservative evangelical proselytizers who have given the word *evangelical* such disgraced connotations! For this shame, the overly zealous fundamentalists among them deserve the regard of lamentful eyes and the sounds of sibilant aspersions.

My crafty great-grandfather's genes are coursing through my arteries and heart and the neural synapses of my brain, and this may be one reason why both Tom and I tellingly developed an almost eerie love for tall tales. This expression of our great granddad's propensities for storytelling and exaggeration have veritably oozed from our souls like unmistakable genetic echoes of the many creative days Mark Twain spent writing at his family home in Hartford, Connecticut, or in his octagonal study atop a ridge at Quarry Farm in western New York state, where he and his family spent many summers.

Tom and I have always marveled about how Mark Twain was fascinated with twins, switched identities, multiple personalities, imposters, and the true reality behind appearances -- and here it turned out that his granddaughter ironically gave birth to twins! For a good perspective on the tone, tenor and particulars of the great author's life, check out the details of my biography of Samuel Langhorne Clemens in *A Quite Curious and Illuminating Biography of Mark Twain*.

One hundred and twelve years have passed since Mark Twain died on April 21, 2010. Cultural changes and many advances in understandings since those days have imprinted modern-day sensibilities upon me, and I have been caught up in new worldviews and more enlightened social and ecological perspectives. I am a bold progressive in my economic and political ideas, and a committed environmentalist with a keen awareness of social and ecological truths. I have a deep respect for balanced perspective, and an evolving sense of fair-minded feminism. The creative writing bug has bitten me, just like it did my great-granddad, and I try to temper my inherited incisive sense of observation with a somewhat sarcastic sense of humor. At the same time, I strive to be as perceptive and precise as possible in all of my evaluations and interpretations of reality. Picture Ernest Hemingway striving to express a true sentence, as portrayed in the evocative Woody Allen film, *Midnight in Paris.*

"My role in society, or any artist's or poet's role,
Is to try and express what we all feel.
Not to tell people how to feel.
Not as a preacher, not as a leader, but as a reflection of us all."

--- John Lennon (1940 – 1980)

<u>Grandiosity or Common Sense</u>?

I have great respect for the stature Mark Twain achieved in the popular imagination and in the world of literature. His philosophical perceptivity, incisively humorous wit, funnily sardonic perspectives on human folly, and sharply astute criticisms of injustices and imperialism are highly commendable. I have leveraged my Twainian inheritance, both genetic and philosophic, with common sense and uncommon thinking, and in the process, I have articulated grand ideas that could meaningfully improve the prospects of the human race, and indeed of most species of life on Earth.

This optimism may sound delusional. It may appear unlikely that we could easily improve our prospects, due to the daunting nature of challenges that lie before us. The prolonged pandemic drastically compounds the challenges we face due to political obstinacy and extreme political partisanship and the perverse priorities of divide-to-conquer leaders who obstruct constructive reform and pursue myopic and selfish agendas. Humanity is being buffeted by periodic economic crises, organizational dysfunction, systemic injustices, extreme weather-related disasters, and the rash depletion of resources. All these developments are being complicated by rapid global human population growth. Our current courses of action are driving an untold number of species of life toward eternal extinction, and it couldn't possibly be a good idea to heedlessly continue on this path.

More than two thousand years ago, a Sicilian scientist named Archimedes declared that he could move the world if he had the right lever and the right place to stand. Here we stand together, still poised on the limestone promontory of Lover's Leap, and we have the right levers in hand to choose to make historically positive changes in the future course of world history.

It is for good reason that I optimistically believe it would be relatively easy and painless for us to achieve more auspicious outcomes for society as a whole. Keep in mind the cosmic principle of both politics and human nature, the Rule of Two Impossibles. When something is declared politically impossible, and yet an alternative option is proved to be impossible to a greater degree, the first impossibility becomes curiously much more feasible.

How could we easily solve a good many of the formidable challenges we face? To start, we could make more concerted efforts to improve healthcare and precautionary preparedness in the U.S. And surely we could act with greater commitment to safeguard the health of ecosystems that sustain us. We could strive to stabilize the number of human beings on Earth before it reaches an overwhelming 9 billion people. Tens of millions of unwanted pregnancies could be prevented every year, for instance, by providing affordable access to modern

contraceptives to women around the world who need them.

Success in these endeavors would reduce the risks, to a significant degree, that come with escalating demands we are placing on ecosystems and the finite resources of our providential home planet. The most important of these solutions are spelled out in *One Dozen Big Initiatives to Positively Transform Our Societies.*

We could also easily make our system of Social Security indefinitely sustainable without cutting benefits for people who need them, and without increasing the retirement age. We could do this without indulging in the roguishly unfair expediency of borrowing money from people in the future to preserve the status quo of the current system. We could courageously address the challenging conundrum of big increases in medical and drug costs, and we could mitigate the stark racial injustices in workplaces and in our healthcare system. We could reduce the risks related to our rapidly increasing national debt by finding fair and effective ways to reduce the outsized budget deficits that are caused by regressive tax cutting, which are adding to the record high public debt every year. Some of these positive solutions are spelled out in *Radically Simple Ways to Make America Fairer, and to Fix Both Social Security and Health Care So We Can Move On to Address Much Bigger Issues.* We just need the political will to make such far-reaching fair-minded changes.

Not only are good solutions achievable, but it is our overarching obligation to strive to make them happen. The main obstacles to solving these problems are found in powerful opposition by vested interest groups, and in correlated internecine battles by our political representatives to triumph over each other in their struggles to gain power and control. This strife generally results only in illusive Pyrrhic victories, at the public expense.

Specific proposals to achieve socially propitious goals are made throughout Common Sense Revival, and in Part Four of the Earth Manifesto online. Note that this manifesto contains more than 2,500 pages in about 100 separate essays. Peruse the Home Page for a good idea of the scope, tenor and organization of the contents. And read on for good ideas for how we should be changing our economy and political system.

"If you want to make God laugh, tell him about your plans."

--- Woody Allen

<u>The Continuing Need for a New and Fairer Deal</u>

President Theodore Roosevelt proposed a Square Deal in 1904. He vowed not to favor any single group of Americans, but to be fair to all. The Square Deal was a proposed domestic program that was based on three main ideas, according to Wikipedia: "conservation of resources, control of corporations, and consumer protection. Thus, it aimed at helping middle class citizens, and involved attacking plutocracy and bad trusts while at the same time protecting business from extreme demands of organized labor."

Theodore Roosevelt worked to break up big business trusts and fight against monopoly practices that railroad conglomerates and other big corporate trusts engaged in. He endorsed new federal regulations designed to limit egregious business practices, improve unsanitary working conditions, and prohibit harmful ingredients in various products -- things that were being exposed by the commendable "muckraker" writers of the time.

As President, Roosevelt was one of the first American leaders to support a form of universal health insurance. He did this, he said, because he believed that no country could be strong whose people were sick and poor. More than 100 years have passed since Roosevelt's presidency, and today there are millions of Americans without health insurance. "Conservatives" today are stubbornly opposing sensible reforms that would make healthcare more affordable and preventative in focus. And life spans of Americans have declined for the last several years (even before the pandemic), a sad trajectory contrasting starkly to that of many other nations.

The time has come for us to provide healthcare for all that includes effective cost controls and is socially affordable. All interested parties should work together to make this happen!

Politics, *n.* A strife of interests masquerading as a contest of principles. The conduct of public affairs for private advantage."

--- Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary*

Our political representatives are responsible for our national decision-making and policy formulation in domestic and international arenas. But politics is far too narrowly focused to give fair and sensible consideration to the best plans for the greater good in the long run. This is why the honorable progressive Senator Paul Wellstone of Minnesota once said that politics should be about the improvement of people's lives and advancing the cause of peace and justice in our country and in the world.

What politics is, and what it should be, are distinctly different things. Politics today has become an internecine conflict between opposing factions competing for influence, power, money and greedy advantages. Compromise has become a dirty word, and working together has fallen out of favor. Obstruction and inflexible "purity pledges" by conservatives were the order of the day when Barack Obama was in office, and now with Joe Biden antagonistic refusals to compromise or act honorably characterize many partisans.

One primary theme of this manifesto is that more comprehensive Big Picture perspectives could lead to more responsible collective actions in our societies. To prevent the disintegration of our societies and the perceptible environmental degradation of our marvelous home planet, we are obliged to find ways to reduce the influence of short-term thinking, ignorance, denial, overly ruthless competition, mismanagement, greed and hubris.

An Important Recommendation

I enthusiastically recommend that every person watch the extraordinary film *Home.* This is a 93-minute-long documentary film produced by Yann Arthus-Bertrand, the eminent French ecologist and aerial photographer, which can be seen online right now. Appreciate the astonishingly beautiful visual images of lovely planet Earth, taken from above in this film, and absorb its profoundly important ecological messages, as narrated by actress Glenn Close. *Home* provides an excellent understanding of the nature and scope of societal and environmental challenges that we all face together, and it makes ecological truths come alive by providing vividly compelling images and cogent insights into the nature of reality and the real impacts of our human activities.

In your mind's eye, fly along with Yann Arthus-Bertrand across the South Pacific over crashing waves on the coastline of Easter Island in the remote reaches of the South Pacific, and see the magnificent and imagination-provoking volcanic stone statues that were erected long ago by the peoples of a vanished civilization. To help in this visualization, check out the film, and you can even toggle to minute 53:36 for the specific footage of a flight over Easter Island and the accompanying observations about it.

Visit a Holy Place

Imagine my great-grandfather looking down on us, bursting with mischievous wit, and making some droll and drawling exaggerations. He would surely ridicule our on-going human foibles, and would not hesitate to express satirical sentiments about our forbearance for abuses of power by corporations, governments and conservative religious authorities. He would likely be aghast that pretentious conspicuous consumption has had such a profligate expression in modern years, since it approaches the extremes experienced during the Gilded Age he wrote about. He would be practically apoplectic that we still have such a national enthusiasm for interventionist wars and economic imperialism, and he would probably sharply criticize our sadly reprehensible and unaffordably costly military occupations of other countries, and our aggressively hawkish military adventurism in general. He was, after all, a leader in the Anti-Imperialist League, America's first national peace movement.

The next time an American leader proposes that we get involved in another long-term military occupation of some foreign country, we would be wise to heed Mark Twain's perceptive words: **"It is easier to stay out than get out."** And that would certainly be a less costly and more good neighborly strategy, to boot!

President Dwight Eisenhower's caveat to the nation in 1961 resonates anew with these ideas: "In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist. We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes. We should take nothing for granted. *Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals, so that security and liberty may prosper together."*

Most people are unaware that Eisenhower regarded the entities that were perpetrating significant threats to a proper balance between national security and individual liberties to be a military-industrial-Congressional complex. The outsized role that Congress, lobbyists, Big Money and other corrupting influences play in our political system cannot be overstated. These driving forces have gotten much worse since Eisenhower's days.

Today, most unfortunately, dire threats to our collective security and personal liberties have arisen from within.

Mark Twain was notably clamorous, back during the courageous trust-busting days of Theodore Roosevelt, about the all-but-evil ways in which giant conglomerate "trusts" abused power by using monopoly practices and operating with unsafe workplaces, long working hours, six-day work weeks, child labor and the like. After all, the last three decades of his life coincided with those of the reform-minded Progressive Era and the muckraking exposés of that time.

Mark Twain himself had invented the phrase the Gilded Age when he co-wrote a book about this era in 1873 titled *The Gilded Age - A Tale of Today.* This was a story about materialism, deception, lobbyist shenanigans, graft and corruption in public life. One theme of the novel is that lust for material things is pervasive in society and people want to get rich by speculating in land and other assets. This book told stories of the pretensions of the nouveau riche and their preoccupations with high status, as reflected in their extravagant consumption.

Abraham Maslow, an American psychologist who first visualized a Hierarchy of Human Needs, expressed the opinion that once people have their basic biological and safety needs met, they seek meaningful things like belonging, intimacy, friendship, love, family, and healthy community relationships. Intermixed with these impulses, and higher up the pyramid -- but still far, far short of enlightened self-actualization -- is a province of self-esteem, achievement, self-gratification, aggressive ostentation, hedonistic pleasure seeking, and a quest for the respect of others (or at least for their envy). ((Or, for malicious narcissists, a quest for notoriety.))

Since *The Gilded Age* was written at the beginning of the first Gilded Age in the late 19th century, it did not yet emphasize the degree of industrialization, corporate dominance, labor strife and urban machine politics that were to come in the decades that followed. Nor did it highlight the obscene amount of extravagance and showy resource-squandering consumerism that became so distinctive a characteristic of the years to follow. Queue up a few commercial jingles to sell some more unnecessary stuff!

I also recommend watching the documentary film *George Harrison: Living in the Material World,* for it inspires a musically enlightened spiritual perspective on the overly materialistic nature of modern societies. The film was produced by Martin Scorsese and George Harrison's second wife, Olivia, who incidentally reveals her simple key to a long marriage: "Don't get divorced." (Aha!)

It is interesting that the Beatles had evolved from struggling musicians to heroes of love, and then ascended to superstardom. When the band progressed to sitar-playing introspection, they adopted alternate personas as members of Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band. This role seems to have provided them with expansive license to experiment with creative songs, songwriting and techniques, and the new alter ego of the Beatles as the Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band freed them to achieve new heights of creative expression. That album was to become one of the most widely acclaimed albums of all time.

After the Beatles performed their last live concert in August 1966, in San Francisco, the four members of the group went their own separate ways, and in 1971 John Lennon recorded *Imagine,* a song with some of the greatest lyrics ever written. Give it another listen, and read the Imagine lyrics to doubly appreciate them.

Sometimes it is valuable to adopt a new point of view to see the world in a more accurate light. In the classic film *It's a Wonderful Life,* for instance, the main character George Bailey, played by Jimmy Stewart, focuses on what's wrong in his life, until an angel shows him what's right with it. This led him to the realization that he actually already had a wonderful life. Be Here Now!

These are the best of times in some ways for the fortunate, and the worst of times for those wracked by debilitating doses of the coronavirus or forced to live with desperate food or financial insecurity. Seeing this, we are obligated to develop more empathetic and compassionate national policies. May Day! May Day!

A Psychological Perspective

A small modicum of greater social justice would be positive for the well-being of all. Even the famous economist Adam Smith would have corroborated this assertion, for he stated in his veritable manifesto of capitalism, *The Wealth of Nations,* that the wealth of a nation is measured by the productivity and living standards of ALL of its people, not just by its accumulated wealth. Adam Smith's book was essentially dedicated to improving the welfare of the common man, not just that of merchants or the upper class. It is one of the most colossal ironies in the history of ideas that this book has been used by wealthy people and the industrialist class as a justification for NOT seeking to remedy the scandalous social ills caused by industrialization. Bah, humbug!

Inequities exist in the access people have to the sources of happiness in capitalist societies. By giving free rein to ruthless and unalloyed greed, a great conundrum is made worse: one of the chief sources of happiness in capitalist societies is found merely in having access to it. Capitalist nations tend to condition their citizens to envy and be envied. As John Fowles pointed out in *The Aristos,* envious people covet not just the apples in an orchard, but the access to the orchard itself.

Such envy is an impulse, and thus a form of movement. As such, it contains the seeds of its own transformation. The positive expression of this potential is found in people who demonstrate a socially responsible support for fairness and progress and integrity in governance, and humane dealings with others.

Since the average person feels like a pawn in the game of national and international politics, and a smaller and smaller pawn as the size of the electorate grows, people's civic senses tend to atrophy. This is bad news for democratic self-governance. A withered sense of real civic responsibility is, according to John Fowles, "one of the most striking phenomena of our age." And it has gotten worse since 1968, when he made this observation.

Puritans in the American colonies and our early democratic republic had a credo that professed both faith and good works together are necessary for personal salvation. Others curiously asserted that God regarded dutiful faith in Him as enough alone to attain salvation. In contrast, Gnostics in the early days of Christianity believed salvation was to be found in enlightenment. God and scriptures are not clear on this matter, so let's consult the providential ideas of Humanism. This philosophy holds that reason, ethical action and fairly-applied justice should be the basis for morality and decision-making. Humanists consequently posit that good works are more desirable for society than do-nothing policies -- or retrogressive ones! -- in the face of an unjust status quo.

Humanism is a philosophy that specifically rejects religious dogma, pseudoscience, supernatural deities and superstitious beliefs as a basis of either morality or public policy decision-making. Hallelujah for this sensible philosophy! Essential aspects of Humanism include a central faith in reason and a continuous adaptive search for truth through philosophic exploration, open-minded reasoning, critical thinking, scientific understandings and honest intuitive awareness.

We should initiate a movement that seeks the truly best ideas about how to successfully adapt to the changes taking place in our societies, and in physical conditions on Earth. And we should strongly support those who are committed to protecting the natural foundations of our prosperity.

I think once again of H.G. Wells' compelling observation: "Human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe." These words are especially relevant today. Dr. Dana Meadows, who is famous for her 1972 book *The Limits to Growth,* was known to optimistically declare that we have exactly enough time to prevent catastrophe -- as long as we begin, "starting now." Folks who are concerned about growing risks of disruptions in the global climate strongly agree with this sentiment, as they demonstrated in New York City and around the world on September 21, 2014 in huge People's Climate Marches, and in advocacy efforts that led us to the Paris Climate Accords in December 2015, and in Women's Marches and the inaugural March for Science on Earth Day 2017, and countless other demonstrations against treacherous abuses of authority.

Change seems to be accelerating as technological innovations proliferate like an algal bloom, and as conditions deteriorate on our home planet. It's as if we are hurtling more than 66,000 miles per hour around the Sun, and picking up speed. (Wait a minute! That would be 575 million miles in a year. Whoa -- steady the course!).

I recommend that readers enjoy some hot Ginger-Infused Health Beverage or icy cold Delicious Mango Papaya Banana Lassi while perusing these words. For simple recipes to make these hyper-healthy beverages, see *Tiffany Twain Entertains: A Philosophic Cookbook*. These two beverages, with their addition of twelve good-health Ayurvedic spices, might in themselves change the world! Ginger helps one's body maintain a proper alkaline balance. This is a key to good health because too much acidity causes a variety of health problems. Acid-forming foods deplete electrolyte minerals like calcium, potassium and magnesium in vital organs and bones, and thus make people more susceptible to diseases and afflictions. All foods tend to be either alkaline-forming or acid forming. Fresh fruits, vegetables and ginger help maintain a healthy pH balance, while acid-forming foods have the opposite effect. Acid-forming foods include meat, eggs, sugars, dairy, most grains, white flour, coffee, carbonated beverages, artificial sweeteners and alcohol.

Enjoying one of these good health beverages may help readers maintain a cool, calm and collected attitude, which is desirable because we need to give serious consideration to the overarching challenges that face the human race in the world today.

Two Remarkable Feminists Speak Up

I love the insights articulated by Olympe de Gouges, one of history's most extraordinary feminists. She lived contemporaneously with Thomas Paine, and was a great humanitarian whose ideas shine brightly like a brilliant beacon flashing from a lighthouse on a rocky headland in dark and stormy weather. Olympe de Gouges was outraged when, after the French Revolution in 1789, the details were revealed of a first written Constitution for France. Her chagrin was enflamed by the fact that this Constitution had been created by revolutionaries to lead France to a fairer future, yet it did not even consider women's suffrage or other key women's issues. It did not mention legal equality in marriage or the right of a woman to divorce her spouse if he abused her, or a woman's right to property or the custody of her children. These omissions motivated Ms. de Gouges in 1791 to create a *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen* to provide an important missing part of the proposed Constitution, and to help women get the legitimate rights they deserve as human beings. Today, more than 230 years later, men continue to ignore such courageous ideas; but hear anew the transcendental truth of their common sense fair-mindedness by reading her 17-point *Declaration* online.

We need not look far back in history to see significant gender inequities. Ponder the Equal Rights Amendment to our own U.S. Constitution. This proposed amendment declares, simply: *Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.* It should be a no-brainer to pass this amendment! Nonetheless, our representatives have been unable to agree with this sensibly fair proposition in adequate numbers to get it ratified, even though it has been introduced in Congress every year since 1923. Congress did finally pass the Amendment in 1972, and President Richard Nixon endorsed its approval by the 50 states, but the forces of reaction and male privilege managed to stymie its ratification by a required three-fourths majority of the states, falling just short. Let's get 'er done!

Back in 1890, a People's Populist Party swept into power in Kansas and took control of the legislature. Mary Elizabeth Lease, one of the party's foremost orators, became a nationally famous stump speaker as she toured all over the country between 1890 and 1896, and she was one of the most prominent women of that decade. Remember that females were denied the vote until 1920. Lease and her husband had lost their farm in the Panic of 1873, so she felt strongly about the ruthlessness of industrialists and Wall Street bankers. She was a powerful speaker who was adept at articulating the discontent of the people, and she had a sharp tongue, so some of her offended opponents bitterly assailed her in the press, accusing her of being a "petticoated smut-mill" and a "virago". Many people thought that a woman's place should be in the home, not on the political stage, so Mary Lease became a favorite target of vitriol, especially because she advocated gender and racial equality. Some opponents altered her middle name from Elizabeth to Ellen, so that they could call her "Yellin' Mary Ellen." She was no doubt one of the "harpies" mentioned by staunch Republican journalist William Allen White in an 1896 editorial, *What's the Matter with Kansas?*

William Allen White was being critical of the Populist influence when he wrote this editorial, but something he belittled happens to ring with a resounding epiphany, in light of conservative spin today about the almost divine

providence of the trickle-down theory: "There are two ideas of government," said our noble William Jennings Bryan at Chicago. "There are those who believe that if you will only legislate to make the well-to-do prosperous, their prosperity will leak through on those below. The Democratic idea has been that if you legislate to make the masses prosperous, their prosperity will find its way up through every class and rest upon them." Right on!

RBG is an excellent documentary film about a supremely inspirational woman, the late Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Known as the "Notorious RBG" for having been a strong advocate for the advancement of gender equality and women's rights, she earned high regard from admirers on account of her common sense fair-mindedness, intelligence, success in improving the stature of women, and brilliant dissenting opinions against decisions made by partisan conservatives who illegitimately dominate the high court. Superhero-like status has been conferred upon RBG, and she became a "pop culture icon". Her stands naturally engendered powerful criticism from right-wing proponents of male privilege in our excessively patriarchal society. A smart rap song went viral commemorating RBG and female Supreme Court Justices. Check out the book *Notorious RBG*, the film RBG and the song *Notorious RBG* by Kelly Cosby and Elizabeth Gavin (watch it on YouTube).

Wes "Scoop" Nisker, a Buddhist meditation instructor and author who was a famous radio commentator in the 1970s, always concluded his radio programs with a provocative tagline that merits my endorsement here: "If you don't like the news, go out and make some of your own!"

Herald the Good News!

Great hope exists for achieving the goal of dramatically improving our societies, and for making them more secure for all. Good hopes also exist for making our economies more inclusive and sustainable. One of the happiest harbingers signaling positive change today is that people are beginning to come together over big issues. When I heard Pope Francis come out with powerful moral arguments for action to mitigate climate change, it was heartening. When almost 200 countries got together in Paris and agreed to bold climate action, I saluted that progress. It is reassuring to know that some evangelicals are championing "creation care", and supporting initiatives to help protect Earth's natural ecosystems with proper stewardship. This is vastly better than spending huge amounts of time, energy and emotion on relatively less consequential hot button social issues.

And when I see thousands of evangelical congregations of many faiths collaborating together in Interfaith Power and Light organizations to conserve energy resources and reduce carbon emissions into the atmosphere, I regard these things as very good, indeed. When I imagine that people might begin to listen to others with opposing viewpoints, and try to think critically about weaknesses in their own arguments and cultivate a greater willingness to seek consensus on the most accurate ways of seeing, I find it to be hope inspiring. When I read thought-provoking books like *Getting to Green – Saving Nature: A Bipartisan Solution,* it inspires hope that sanity will prevail and we will choose new leaders who will step forward to satisfy our overarching national obligation to be better stewards of nature by collaborating together for the greater good. A bipartisan Climate Solutions Caucus in Congress provides a basis for the beginnings of such collaboration.

These developments give hope that we may begin to be more responsible in dealing with unfolding existential challenges. I feel strongly that it would be an excellent idea for us to invest our emotions in important issues to a degree proportional to the consequences involved, and thus put more of our energies and money into addressing the biggest issues that confront humanity, like excessive consumption and waste and activities that damage creation and produce too much trash and pollutants and plastics and environmental toxins.

I regard foresightful awareness as humanity's most important quality for its value in achieving prosperity, well-being and survival. In rash contrast, denials of the most responsible and farsighted understandings, especially in the service of narrowly self-centered ideological agendas, is one of the most ominous harbingers of a failure to adapt to changing circumstances, as time lapses steadily and inexorably into the future. It is curiously true that, despite the fact that simple and good solutions exist to achieve healthier goals, two particular problems stand in the way. The devil, as they say, is often in the details.

First, we are collectively addicted to living beyond our means and indulging in national spending financed by borrowing more money from taxpayers in every future year, without offsetting it by finding new revenues. And

second, there is the elephant in the room: wealthy people, who are easiest able to help pay for improved education and healthcare, a stronger social safety net, infrastructure investments and protections of the environment are the very ones who have the power and propensity to prevent initiatives that require them to pay higher taxes to fund greater good goals and a fairer, more sustainable society. A majority of rich people, tragically, are opposed to plans that would assess higher rates of taxes on the highest levels of incomes, or that would close tax loopholes that primarily benefit the wealthiest 1% of Americans.

All the insights contained in *Sad Implications of the Two Dueling Santa Claus Strategies in Political Economics* are included herein by this reference, in all their redundant splendor, in these aspirational Happy Harbinger ideas. So are the understandings contained in *Climate Change Considerations, Carrying Capacity, and Ecological Overshoot.* A good balance of yin and yang is almost always a superior amalgam.

Perhaps the happiest harbinger of all is how starkly clear it has become to most Americans that substantive and meaningful change is needed in our country and the world. This may be the happiest harbinger to be materializing in the 21st century, among a passel of portentous and potentially unhappy harbingers. We Americans face a choice between leaders that are willing to pursue common sense positive changes and those who advocate far-right doctrines and a wrongheaded agenda and reactionary impulses. Trump Republicans, unfortunately, represent manipulative fear-exploiting power-abusing steps backward, in the wrong direction.

Reflections on Rogue Actors

The masts on our ship of state are creaking ominously, and the right-wing spin machine keeps prescribing remedies that do more harm than good. "More of the Reagan medicine, that's what we need," they intone. "We want none of those generic drugs, what we need is full strength uncompromising Reaganism. More military spending, less taxes on the rich! Down with unions! Repeal regulations!!" Significant factions supported the Tea Party and right-wing House Freedom Caucus, and now the MAGA Trump cult, and they all strive to rally the faithful to their backwards causes, despite the objectionable nature of their agenda. Donald Trump is an egomaniacal wild card in this calculus, and he and his supporters threaten to sink the ship of our democratic republic altogether.

Freedoms are inextricably accompanied by a need to act responsibility. The same is true of wealth. This is an aspect of ethical humanism enunciated by Will and Ariel Durant in their thought-provoking book, *The Lessons of History,* and it is echoed by John Fowles in *The Aristos,* and by many others.

In a speech at the Brandenburg Gate in 1987, Ronald Reagan extolled freedom, security and world peace. He implored the Russians, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall." Beliefs can become reality, he said. This can actually be quite true! I believe we should cultivate wholesome beliefs that are consistent with liberty and security for all people in our nation, AND we should strive for peace everywhere in the world. We should sensibly insist on giving valid reasons to our heirs in future generations for them to believe we have acted fairly enough to make our societies less expediently short-term-oriented. We should move toward a balanced budget and avoid rashly exploiting resources and damaging ecosystems so severely that the prospects for well-being of people in the future are excessively compromised. Listen to the TedTalk, *How to be a good ancestor!*

The Soviet Union collapsed in 1989 after 10 years of having its military forces occupy Afghanistan. As fate would have it, the U.S. did not learn the costly lessons of the folly of having intervened militarily in Vietnam after the French had given up their own 8-year long war there. As a result, we rashly blundered into an almost 20-year-long military occupation of Afghanistan -- and no good end of turmoil in that region is in sight. Not only that, but we compounded the terrible cost of our brash and pious Middle East adventurism by aggressively attacking and occupying oil-rich Iraq for many years. And war hawks like John Bolton and Mike Pompeo have aggressively rattled the saber for a war with Iran.

"What a gyp!", exclaimed Thomas Twain. He was talking about the absurdly high cost of wars with questionable goals in Southeast Asia and the Middle East over the course of the past 70 years. When the vaunted Vietnamese General Vo Nguyen Giap celebrated his 100th birthday in 2011, I did a quizzical double take, but said nothing. (General Giap died in October 2013.)

Who profited the most from these wars? It would be eminently reasonable to assess higher taxes on those who profit from wars to help finance with the far-reaching problems created by imperialism and violent conflicts.

Introspection into Government

Mark Twain's observation that "We have the best government that money can buy" is an odd and thought-provoking one. Almost everyone I know would agree that when we allow Big Money to buy our representatives, it allows rich people to have an excessively domineering influence, and common folk are forced to endure impacts that are highly negative on the masses and society and the providential ecological commons. In this sense, we are vastly overpaying for our government!

We are paying a ridiculously excessive premium for a political system that is corrupted by entrenched interest groups. Greedy rich people are the primary culprits in this state of affairs, because they jealously insist on getting and keeping the biggest proportion of the economic benefits of our system for themselves. And as a consequential result, our government has been rigged to give insufficient influence to common good goals.

The richest one percent of households in the U.S. own just about as much of the country's wealth as the bottom 90% of households in the USA. That is morally wrong, and steps should betaken to reduce this inequity.

Critics charge that the U.S. government is dysfunctional, and many opinions in this manifesto corroborate such a characterization. But in the big picture, this is nonsense. Let's look again. The government is not the least bit dysfunctional from the standpoint that it is very successfully achieving the main function that power-abusing vested interest groups want it to do: RUTHLESSLY ADVANCING THE SELFISH GOALS OF THOSE WHO ARE MOST PRIVILEGED.

The government is, however, horribly dysfunctional from the perspective of the vast majority of the American people. This majority would be much better served by having a government that is managed more fairly and guided more properly. We would be much better off having a government that would honestly and courageously adopt more sensible national priorities. It would be much better if the representatives we elect would work together better and make fair compromises that take into account the greater good for all. We would be better off, in aggregate, if our leaders acted responsibly to choose to enact national policies that really reduced inequality of opportunities and outcomes in our country.

Political corruption and institutionalized bribery are the primary reasons that the federal government fails to enact policies consistent with the common good. Economic inequality and environmental injustices are, to a large extent, political phenomena. They are NOT necessary states of affairs.

An oath of office is required of all our national representatives. In this official oath, they swear to support and defend the Constitution. This oath requires them to "well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office" to which they have been elected. The American people today hold their representatives in low regard because of nasty partisanship in Congress, and also because of cyclical high rates of unemployment in the nation, and stagnating wages for most working people, and now in 2022, rapid inflation to go with dangerously high levels of national debt. In addition, scandalous sweetheart deals that our representatives give themselves are sometimes revealed, earning deserved scorn.

"There is nothing wrong with America that can't be fixed," said President Obama once observed. "What's broken is our politics." Understanding this, it becomes obvious that we need to demand fairer fixes!

Congress has made many revealing December compromises, confirming a fact that should be apparent to every observer. Deep down beneath the sound and fury of rancorous political discord and the ruthless competition between our representatives for the most lavish possible pandering to wealthy people, a complacent calm prevails. We can see that this underlying collaboration between the two wings in our political duopoly acts as one in its purpose and outcomes. This basic intent is to stay the course in the über-arena where influential wealthy people all agree together that national tax policies should not be made more progressive, so that wealth can continue to be concentrated in the bank accounts of the top dog wealthiest 1% fat cats.

Even the Supreme Court has gone along with Congress and the Federal Reserve in this overarching game-rigging

strategy. The five "conservative" Justices on the Supreme Court before Antonin Scalia died often basically violated the oaths of office they once took by betraying *We the People* when they made decisions using ideological rationalizations, twisted logic, narrow legal interpretations, partisan political predispositions, and unfair lavishly generous favoritism of the interests of rich people and giant corporations.

The Judicial Oath of office that Supreme Court Justices are required to take before they begin fulfilling the duties of their offices is straightforward and clear. They put their hand on a Bible and must declare: "I, _*(name)*_, do solemnly swear that I will administer justice without respect to persons, and do equal right to the poor and to the rich, and that I will faithfully and impartially discharge and perform all the duties incumbent upon me as Supreme Court Justice under the Constitution and laws of the United States. So help me God."

When these Justices make decision after decision in favor of moneyed interests, and against the greater good, and do so by a narrow majority of conservatives, this reveals a direct violation of the intent of this oath. This is systemic corruption. It is anathema to the valuable democratic ideal of a truly independent judiciary. The conservatives on the Court must begin to be much less ideologically partial to the rich! Let's demand that Congress pass a proposed Judiciary Act to expand the number of Justices to give more balanced influence.

Supreme Court Fail

Conservatives deem it "politically impossible" to achieve reforms that require increases in federal revenues. To the extent that this is true, it is mainly so because wealthy interests, corporations and other anti-democratic forces control our public decision-making, using the undue influence of their Big Money to gain Big Power, thanks in part to the nakedly partisan conservative majority on the Supreme Court that ruled 5 to 4 to give them more influence with the 2010 *Citizens United* decision and the later *McCutcheon* ruling.

When the Supreme Court struck down even the anemic efforts that have been made to control the financing of election campaigns in its *Citizens United* ruling, basically endorsing institutional bribery, former Justice John Paul Stevens expressed a strongly worded dissent. He stated that conservative ideologies about campaign finance laws "rejected the common sense of the American people, who have fought against the distinctive corrupting potential of corporate electioneering since the days of Theodore Roosevelt." Yes, siree!!

Justices John Roberts, Clarence Thomas, Samuel Alito and Trump's new partisan appointees Gorsuch, Kavanaugh and Barrett should begin to heed the implications of the understanding that money is subverting the greater good in our nation by giving far too much power and privileges to the wealthy few. This is having distinctly detrimental real consequences for the American people. A tsunami of secretive dark money and special interest funds from Super PACs has created such a barrage of distorting and negative political ads that it is driving Americans practically crazy, while undermining the adaptive health of our democratic process.

Inside Job

Charles Ferguson expounded on the topic of inequality and oligarchy in his stunning book, *Predator Nation: Corporate Criminals, Political Corruption, and the Hijacking of America:* "The Occupy Wall Street protestors were deeply right about one thing: over the last thirty years, the United States has been taken over by an amoral financial oligarchy, and the American Dream of opportunity, education and upward mobility is now largely confined to the top few percent of the population. Federal policy is increasingly dictated by the wealthy, by the financial sector, and by powerful (though sometimes badly mismanaged) industries such as telecommunications, health care, automobiles, and energy. These policies are implemented and praised by the willing servants of these groups, namely the increasingly bought-and-paid-for leadership of America's political parties, academia, and lobbying industry."

"If allowed to continue, this process will turn the United States into a declining, unfair society with an impoverished, angry, uneducated population under the control of a small, ultra-wealthy elite. Such a society would be not only immoral but also eventually unstable, dangerously ripe for religious and political extremism."

"Thus far, both political parties have been remarkably clever and effective in concealing this new reality. In fact, the two parties have formed an innovative kind of cartel -- an arrangement I have termed America's

political duopoly, which I analyze in detail below. Both parties lie about the fact that they have each sold out to the financial sector and the wealthy. So far, both have largely gotten away with the lie, helped in part by the enormous amount of money now spent on deceptive and manipulative political advertising. But that can't last indefinitely; Americans are getting angry, and even when they're misguided or poorly informed, people have a deep, visceral sense that they're being screwed."

Charles Ferguson added another interesting perspective: "The rise of predatory finance is both a cause and symptom of an even broader, and even more disturbing, change in America's economy and political system. The financial sector is the core of a new oligarchy that has risen to power over the past thirty years, and that has profoundly changed American life."

This political duopoly arrangement makes clamorous sound-and-fury about the intense fighting over values issues like affordable healthcare, abortion and equal rights for gay people, but this distorting noise inimically serves to divert attention from the financial sector's "quiet coup," to use a phrase coined by economist Simon Johnson. This strategy shrewdly divides potential opposition to it. People who should be aligned together in calling for fairer taxes, campaign finance reform, stricter financial regulation, better and more affordable public education, and needed investments in America's infrastructure are instead divided by their opposing views on issues like tax policy, immigrants, gun laws, contraception, women's reproductive rights and gay marriage. This strategy has worked well for politicians in both parties, but the uncontrolled growth of America's financial sector and a correlated consolidation of wealth and power by the rich, with the help of their Trojan Horse conservative politicians, has had poisonous and deleterious ramifications for most Americans.

This is part of a long-term on-going plot against America and democratic fairness, and the general welfare. As the days slide past like turbulent water over a succession of cascades, the magnitude of the threat posed by divisive demagoguery increases. Yes, the establishment has perverted the broad positive values of global fair trade by letting ruthless corporations turn it into a racket where working people and consumers are exploited and ecosystems and the environment are harmed to benefit CEOs and investors. This means that change must be made, and the overall happy harbinger concealed in this understanding is that the proper nature of needed reforms becomes clearer with Right View and Right Mindfulness.

Mark Twain would have guffawed with wry and sardonic amusement at the onward trajectory from his astute observation that "we have the best government that money can buy." Charles Ferguson adds: "Unless America reverses course, things will end badly, at least for the bottom 90% of Americans, and possibly for the wealthy who consider themselves safe." The pitchforks will eventually come out if we fail to fix things by enacting smart and far-reaching reforms, and likely sooner rather than later -- and pitched battles would be devastating.

These historic expressions of truth come at a critical juncture in American history. We are still waiting for effective efforts to expand overall well-being in the USA, and I'm hoping humanity will honestly begin a peaceful revolution that will help assure a more salubrious future. We can all help make this come true by embracing the resounding force of progressive ideas, like those recommended in this manifesto, and by widely hearing and respecting them. Hear ye now -- Lend your voice to these ideas -- and vote for leaders likely to represent greater good goals!

Basic Economics and Corporate Power

Corporations long ago began sprawling across national boundaries, and their power has grown beyond that of any nation's government. Globalization has some positive economic merits, but corporations are far too socially and environmentally irresponsible to allow them to continue monopolizing business and growing too big. They can no longer be allowed to privatize profits while foisting many real costs of production activities upon society and future generations. Corporations cannot be allowed to continue running roughshod over the greater good.

Capitalism and democracy are, in one sense, opposed to each other, just as freedom and equality are essentially competing and often conflicting values. The greater the freedom a society allows, and the fewer the number of fairness-oriented regulations, the more that inequalities naturally multiply. And the rich get richer.

Capitalist societies have incorporated many "socialistic" provisions into their economic systems to ensure a somewhat fairer modicum of equality. Meanwhile, socialistic societies have included capitalistic provisions of free enterprise and some individual liberties in their economic systems in order to offer a greater stimulus to entrepreneurial activities. "East is West and West is East, and soon the twain will meet," the historians Will and Ariel Durant once poetically opined, in *The Lessons of History.*

Socialism benefits from capitalist ideals by providing people with stronger motives to be productive, and by allowing people to benefit from their labors and thus enjoy more freedom. Outcomes of an interesting Russian social experiment many years ago showed that individual farmers were much more productive on small private plots than farmers who worked on acreage devoted to big collective farms. This is one reason that China, Russia and other socialistic societies have embraced laissez-faire economics to a degree.

Capitalism puts the profit motive on the highest pedestal of our imaginations. But then it allows wealthy people to invidiously commandeer most of the benefits of increased productivity for themselves. This is why capitalist societies need to limit abuses of power and ruthlessness of monopolies through "socialistic" legislation and tax plans that effectively share wealth more broadly.

Unfortunately, the tentacles of Shock Doctrine Disaster Capitalism are squeezing the vitality out of workers and the middle class. These corporate tentacles are sapping the strength and fairness from our great American experiment in democracy, and consequently causing a ruinous erosion of public health, the common good and trust that government in democracies can succeed in improving conditions. The scheming corporate squeeze is an assault on the majority of people by the few, an assault on good governance, fairness, and the health of the environment that sustains us. It is an assault on the quality of life and standard of living of the majority of people. No amount of hyperbole is sufficient to express the outrageousness of this inequitable exploitation, or the amount of damage it is doing to our home planet and the healthy biological diversity of life on Earth.

It is a revealing aspect of our capitalist economic systems that corporations are allowed to make the maximum profits that they can, by hook or by crook. Yet this state of affairs need not necessarily be changed to reduce the distortions caused by corporate cost-externalizing practices. We should start by requiring all businesses to include all costs of production in the prices of the products and services they sell. They can pass these costs on to consumers if they are able. This requirement would have the positive effect of mitigating misallocations of resources caused by cost-externalizing gambits and their distorting impacts on purchases, consumption and decision-making. A specific proposal to achieve this sensible goal is contained in *One Dozen Big Initiatives to Positively Transform Our Societies.*

The Struggle by Capital to Exploit Workers

Capitalist economic systems seem to have triumphed over societies that listened to the ideas of Karl Marx, with his oh-so-Marxian declaration, "Workers of the World, Unite!" Capitalists today are triumphing over workers in a more startlingly unfair manner than at any time since the end of the Roaring Twenties.

To prevent worker unity and power to the people, wealthy people in our capitalist societies have collaborated with right wing ideologues to use the power of their money to create ever-more insecure conditions for workers. CEOs made 20 times as much as the average worker in 1950s. In 2017, the average amount a CEO of a Fortune 500 Company made was more than 350 times as much as the average worker. And yet the net effective rate of taxes that these highly compensated people pay has been reduced significantly. One way that CEOs have proven their value to corporate profit-making is by ensuring excessively tight control over employee headcount and worker pay, overtime and benefits, and by terminating employees whenever convenient. These developments are bizarrely unfair in light of the crucial value of workers to the success of businesses.

The rich are winning a Pyrrhic victory over the greater good of the people. They are also winning a similarly shortsighted victory over the common good of our communities, our countries, peoples of other nations, and all people in future generations. And they are spearheading a kind of ecological Pyrrhic victory over all other forms of life on Earth. The original Pyrrhic victory was a victory won in battle where the victorious forces suffered devastating losses, led by Pyrrhus, the conquering-crazed King of Epirus in modern day northwestern

Greece, over the Romans in 279 BCE at Asculum, in what is now southern Italy. The Greek Pyrrhus used war elephants and a superior cavalry to gain this costly triumph over the Romans, but the heavy losses he suffered caused him to exclaim: "One more such victory, and we shall be undone."

Today's Pyrrhic victories by capitalists over workers are temporary triumphs where workers are required to work harder without adequate increases in compensation and security. These ephemeral victories are achieved to give rich people more wealth. High costs for worker healthcare and retirement security are being foisted onto others, and the harm done to people and the health of our communities is tragic and costly. We cannot allow these Pyrrhic victories to cause our societies to become more undone!

There are three reasons that Pyrrhic victories by rich people presage future calamities. First, there are health reasons. It is foolhardy not to invest in the health of the nation's people merely to stimulate profits by insurance companies and drug companies. Second, there are economic reasons. It is a poor strategy to undermine the solvency of the majority of consumers, who are responsible for 70% of the total spending in our economy. And third, it is politically risky to court the wrath of the poor and the middle class by imposing austerity measures on the majority, thus harshly exacerbating inequalities while allowing the highest income earners to pay the lowest rates of taxes in generations.

> "The war against working people should be understood to be a real war. It's not a new war. It's an old war. Furthermore, it's a perfectly conscious war everywhere, but specifically in the United States … which happens to have a highly class-conscious business class … and they have long seen themselves as fighting a bitter class war, except they don't want anybody else to know about it."
>
> --- Noam Chomsky, *Propaganda and Control of the Public Mind*

The international economy is practically predicated on American consumerism. Since over two-thirds of the U.S. economy is based on consumer spending, it is inevitable that consumers cannot keep up this spending spree when economic bubbles periodically create high rates of joblessness. Real incomes of workers were about flat from 1981 through 2020, after the Reagan Revolution began to undermine the power of workers and give most of the enormous benefits of increased productivity to CEOs and investors, and very little of it to workers. The economy had been supported until the housing bubble burst by high levels of borrowing against home equity, before a temporary steep decline in home prices.

A more stable and fairly distributed prosperity would be better for all concerned, in the long run. This is true because the equitability of having wealth more broadly distributed would ensure less insecurity for the masses. When people are subjected to ever-growing insecurity, it is a dangerous condition because it harms people, encourages crime, increases the potential for violence, and provides a powerful impetus toward political instability and even violent revolutionary change. This is one reason why we should enact fairer legislative partial redistributions by means of more steeply graduated taxes. In the short term, we should strive to ensure that poor people and those in the middle class are made more secure. This would stimulate the economy much more holistically and sanely than allowing policies to prevail in which national debt-financed regressive tax cuts principally benefit the richest Americans. Fairer treatment of working people would result in economic growth, more tax revenue and reduced budget shortfalls.

I challenge all Americans to demand that their representatives begin to honor the greater good and promote the general welfare of the majority of people. We should reject the insidiously unfair goals of giant corporate entities and rich people when they undermine our common prospects for prosperity. We have been goosing the world economy with stimulative deficit-financed consumerism for decades, and this game is now reaching a crescendo that makes fairer and more prudent policies necessary. The paradigms of human behavior simply must become more sustainable.

Rich people have been abusing the power that comes with their increasing monopoly on the nation's wealth by refusing to contribute a fairer share of the total tax burden. They are slowly strangling American workers by tightly controlling the compensation and benefits that workers receive, and by demanding that federal and state governments cut spending on programs that benefit the poor and the middle class while perpetuating the

many methods by which the rich prosper. They do not want to share their prosperity, and they are strongly opposed to sharing any sacrifices needed to make our system more sustainable.

As a result, the U.S. has the highest inequality of wealth in the industrialized world. The implications and outcomes associated with this fact are unconscionable. It reminds me once again of Warren Buffet's astute observation: "There's class warfare, all right, but it's my class, the rich class, that's making war, and we're winning it." President Obama repeatedly proposed ending the low tax rates enacted under George W. Bush. But rich people insist on their entitlement to these boondoggle-like boons, so little progress has been made in this regard. Paul Ryan, responding with vitriol to such a proposal in 2011, accused the President of "class warfare".

One thing should be perfectly clear to Americans: class warfare started long ago with political favoritism of the wealthy and regressive tax policies. Ending this excessive favoritism in our nation is a goal that is important. Republicans are on the wrong side of this issue. Once again, as in their opposition to many progressive reforms in the past century, they are also on the wrong side of history. Pandering to Big Money may be good politics in the short run, but it sure isn't Christian, or fair, or responsible, or ultimately sustainable.

Uniting Americans to Achieve Greater Good Goals

E Pluribus Unum appears on the Great Seal of the United States. This motto is also shown on coins, the $1 bill, and passport covers. It means "Out of Many, One." This was the *de facto* motto of the U.S. from 1776 until 1956. *E Pluribus Unum* is a symbol of both an ideal and our national challenge of seeking unity while respecting diversity. As such, the idea has played a crucial role in shaping our history, our literature and our national character. Uniting with others to oppose egregious injustices and extreme inequalities is appropriate, honorable and eminently ethical. It gives recognition to the overarching wisdom of the Golden Rule. The values embodied in the Golden Rule are like basic functional acts of hygiene, rather than being merely optional expediencies or something motivated by anticipated pleasure or self-satisfaction or feelings of social esteem.

True security resides in the twin Golden Rule concepts of more equal social justice for all and lesser financial hardships for the majority. True security is not to be found in an ever-more extreme concentration of wealth in the hands of a few, and real security is not to be found in the harsh repression of dissent. Improved national security is best achieved by avoiding extremely costly and aggressive military conflicts around the globe. I believe that drone bomber attacks on people in sovereign nations are especially unjust and unwise. Strategies like these provoke deep antagonisms and give counter-support to destabilizing extremists, and they incite episodes of harmfully dangerous blowback retaliation.

A new paradigm of social action is needed that is more inclusive, holistic, peaceable, fair, long-term oriented and sustainable. This new way of living should be designed to protect the underpinnings of our prosperity by including measures that help ensure the health of natural ecosystems and the environmental commons.

Many people, ever since the days long ago when Aesop was telling his pithy stories, have noted that "United we stand, divided we fall". In pathetic counterpoint to this wisdom, some of those who control our nation -- most notably, reactionary conservatives -- find that it is easiest to control people by sowing division and conflict between people, and by taking advantage of feelings of grievance, rather than by trying to foster harmony and make collaborative efforts at problem solving. We should reject the usurpation of power by those who try to scapegoat minorities and divide Americans in their zeal to control and dominate us. By uniting, we could alter our collective destinies and give control of our country back to the people.

An old maxim states that eternal vigilance is the price of liberty. Vigilance is an alert quality of attentive watching and seeing, and of true understanding of what is going on. It is clear that we would be best served by coming together in unity of purpose to take back our country from those who are abusing their power and undermining the foundations of well-being and liberty for the vast majority of Americans. I encourage readers to support a movement that champions farsighted ideas and propitious public policies.

Our National Motto Significantly Altered

In 1956, Congress passed an Act that adopted a new official national motto: *In God We Trust*. A trust in God may be a fine virtue for individuals, because faith can help provide hope and moral guidance. Faith may assuage people's fears, insecurities and natural trepidations about the fact that each of us, sooner or later, is going to die. But faith sure seems to me to be a poor strategy to rely on as an honest or adequately effective means of solving our domestic and international problems.

The views of Texas Governor Rick Perry unfolded bizarrely during his brief run for President in 2012. His evangelical faith stood in stark contrast to the idea that we should courageously act to improve our societies. He claimed instead that prayer is the best approach for solving problems. But really, God is far too elusive to be relied upon to fairly adjudicate conflicts between all the competing interests in our society.

Fine, fine, fine with all the prayer stuff, evangelicals. There are positive qualities associated with the practice of praying, but let's not make the mistake of placing our trust in a providence designed by reactionary male social engineers who represent the interests of the few, and who apparently don't give a damn about equality of opportunity or true social fairness, or women's rights, or resource conservation, or environmental protections, or protecting open spaces and National Parks and saving wilderness areas. Let's reject efforts by apologists and operatives who claim they believe in creating a "kinder and gentler" society, when in reality they push obtuse policies that make our country more unequal, less fair and overly lacking in empathy and compassionate caring.

Placing our trust in God has an accompanying liability: people argue intensely about <u>whose</u> God is the right one. This leads to a wide range of problems including religious strife that intensifies the already serious conflicts between people of differing faiths. Beware of conservative religious fundamentalists! There are many master manipulators in our midst.

All the great prophets of every faith espoused transcendent virtues of peace, love, tolerance, compassion and forgiveness. There must be something critically important to them!

<u>A Proclamation by Thomas Twain</u>

My twin brother Tom has always been a real rascal. When I told him that the motto *E Pluribus Unum* had been abandoned in favor of *In God We Trust,* he veritably chortled. "Think about it," he said, shaking his head. "We tossed aside the most admirable principle in the history of national unity and diversity-respecting ideals, and replaced it with a divisive parochial religious doctrine that in practice might as well be, <Hail to the chosen few, all others go to Hell.> No wonder our nation is going to hell in a handbasket."

Tom snorted triumphantly in gleeful rapture at his clever witticism. We had been talking in a desultory way about how the good old USA had spent the decades after the trauma of the Second World War investing in a great system of public schools and universities, an extensive national highway system, worker protections, a social security safety net, civil rights initiatives, a modicum of gender equality, and protections of Clean Air, Clean Water, public lands, wild and scenic rivers, wilderness areas and endangered species of life. I had mentioned that these forward-looking public policies were financed from 1940 to 1980 by a progressive tax structure in which rich people paid taxes on the highest levels of incomes at rates of at least 70% every year.

Then Tom did an interesting thing. He methodically placed a soapbox on some low risers in the living room, put on an old military hat, saluted an imaginary flag, and began a stentorian-voiced harangue: "I say unto you that, without a shred of doubt, we create the conditions in our societies by choosing to institute the specific policies we pursue. It is almost as if we live in a world of cause and effect!" Then he collapsed in a paroxysm of laughter. Perhaps you had to have been there, and I must admit that a good friend once deemed Tom to be trying to be "too clever by half."

We laughed together at Tom's antics, and wondered if the physicist Werner Heisenberg, who had articulated an abstruse physical uncertainty principle, had ever thought about formulating a <u>Social</u> Uncertainty Principle. Bertrand Russell certainly gave us pause for thought when he expressed this opinion: "The fundamental cause of trouble in the world today is that the stupid are cock-sure, while the intelligent are full of doubt."

America prospered during the 40-year period before 1980 when high-income people paid taxes at more steeply graduated rates. Then Ronald Reagan launched his folksy anti-egalitarian revolution in favor of the rich, and against progressive taxation and the rights of workers, and he set us on a trajectory of excessively wasteful military spending and huge debt increases that diminish the general welfare and erode our national security.

President Reagan shrewdly couched his powerful ideas in soaring rhetoric about a Shining City on a Hill. He asserted that the United States is "the last best hope of man on earth." But then he espoused insidiously unfair "voodoo economics" policies and acted to stoke inequality in America. He took a nap and let his minions try to extinguish the hope of the masses -- there I go again -- by using hyped-up fears of Communism to ram through regressive taxation schemes and anti-regulation initiatives. He worked to reduce collective bargaining rights of workers, and diverted the public's attention by contending that, to make everything work better, we should enact a new Constitutional Amendment that would decree individual and group prayer must be allowed in public schools. Surely that would help provide providential succor for the democratic masses, the suckers! Ha!

Tom was in one of his not infrequent spells of braggadocio, so he adopted a voice of mock indignation and chided me for being deeply concerned about social problems. "Get a life!", he suggested. Tom is a big thinker, not unlike Mark Twain's character Tom Sawyer, always hatching clever plans and trying to work new angles and pulling pranks and looking for adventure. Remember that Tom Sawyer took advantage of unsuspecting friends to help him with what he considered the opprobrious chore of spending the day whitewashing a tall fence.

Today, mere whitewashing will no longer do, here or anywhere. We must agree that the fence is dilapidated and needs to be fixed as well as painted, and we must come to a consensus on the type and color of paint to be used -- and we need to begin the project! Let's not subcontract the difficult job of improving our societies to rip-off artists, hypocritical deceivers, manipulative bait-and-switch priority changers, giant multinational corporations, no-bid contractors, naysayers, or right-wing conservatives intent on unfair and domineering control. And let's reject the snide and coldly calculating money-grubbing Mercurial Trickster Trump and his loyalist enablers!

The Denouement of Thomas Paine

Thomas Paine apparently loved his role as a rabble-rouser for revolution so much that, after having helped launch the American Revolution in 1776, he spent most of his time in England and France once the French Revolution began in 1789. He wrote heretical tracts there, including *The Age of Reason*, and *The Rights of Man.* Fearing his writings would be suppressed, he sent Part One of *The Age of Reason* to America, and asked for his ideas to be safeguarded. In the Introduction, he wrote: "You will do me the justice to remember, that I have always strenuously supported the Right of every Man to his own opinion, however different that opinion might be to mine. He who denies to another this right, makes a slave of himself to his present opinion, because he precludes himself the right of changing it." He added, "The most formidable weapon against errors of every kind is Reason. I have never used any other, and I trust I never shall."

In 1792, Thomas Paine was forced to flee from England to France because *The Rights of Man* had been banned as seditious libel against the monarchy in England, and he was convicted in absentia. The French people embraced him, but the nobility did not, and he was imprisoned in Paris from late 1793 until July 1794 for his liberal ideas. He was fortunate not to be sent to the guillotine, and was freed when Maximilien de Robespierre, the architect of the Reign of Terror, was himself sent to the guillotine.

One reason Thomas Paine became notorious is because *The Age of Reason* advocated the deist idea that one and only one God exists, and it criticized theistic dogmas that posited a Holy Trinity of three Gods in one -- a Father, a Son, and a Holy Ghost. He promoted freethinking and reason, and argued against institutionalized religion in general, and Christian doctrines in particular.

The French Revolution ended the feudal privileges of the nobility, and led to the establishment of freedoms of speech, public assembly and the press. Some of the Church's wealth was expropriated after the Revolution began to help rescue a bankrupt nation in the aftermath of the overthrow of King Louis XVI. Later, these positive outcomes of the French Revolution were followed by some destructive excesses. Note that the increased likelihood of social instability when inequities become too pronounced provides us with an excellent

reason today to take bold and broad-minded steps, in advance, to prevent financial instability, worsening economic inequities, and increased dissatisfactions that contribute to impetuses for revolution.

The Revolution against the French nobility and most of the religious authorities of the Roman Catholic Church was a salvo against tyranny, but it suffered from the big risk that during revolutionary unrest, injustices are increasingly likely to take place. A violent revolution is a thing we should strive to prevent, and NOT by means of repression but rather by means of reasonably fair reforms and a modicum of egalitarian measures. During a violent revolution, democratic reforms are generally suspended while a new despotism arises that allows new assaults and tyrannical abuses of authority. This often results in terrible atrocities like thousands of people being beheaded that happened during the Reign of Terror several years after the French Revolution began.

King Louis XVI was executed by having his head chopped off by a guillotine in January 1793. The question of what to do with "Let them eat cake" Queen Marie Antoinette was a tumultuous one. Thomas Paine advocated that she be exiled to America. But by October, her fate was settled, and she too was sent to the guillotine.

What's Up, Doc?

A few years ago, I read the phenomenal book, *Spontaneous Evolution: Our Positive Future (And A Way to Get There From Here).* This book, according to Thom Hartmann, is "a world-changing book that offers a heartening view of humanity's destiny. Built on the foundation of the latest discoveries in science, it points us in the direction of functional politics, sustainable economics, and individual responsibility in the context of an interdependent community."

We surely have a great need for a better functioning political system! It would also be an excellent idea to encourage economic activities that are more likely to be sustainable, and to foster collective behaviors that are consistent with these goals. We need people to demonstrate greater individual responsibility in the context of interdependent communities. I can't imagine any sensible person disagreeing with the idea that we all have some degree of obligation to leave a fairer legacy to people in the future than current trends portend. These things can be achieved by embracing a new holistic worldview, as provocatively proposed in *Spontaneous Evolution,* and as articulated in many of the ideas set forth in this manifesto.

Every good architect and engineer knows that a solid foundation is critically important to building a safe edifice. Skyscrapers, for instance, need to be anchored on bedrock, and it would be shortsightedly crazy to build them with inadequate foundations, shoddy structural materials, or overly rigid frameworks, especially in areas prone to high winds or earthquakes. Likewise, to build a sound economy and a healthy commonwealth in an age of epidemic, choleric, chaos and turmoil, a flexible framework of smart public policies is needed that takes into account the best knowledge and understandings.

Riane Eisler posits in *The Chalice and the Blade* that we have a realistic possibility to shift from a system that leads to chronic wars, widespread social injustice and ecological imbalance to a system of greater social justice, more egalitarian relationships, peaceable coexistence and more farsighted ecological balance. What is needed to accomplish this transformation is new intellectual and cultural perspectives, and radically reformed social and political institutions -- and better management. And less institutional corruption and a diminished ability of narrowly self-interested actors to dominate politics and the economic system.

To paraphrase Swami Beyondananda in *Spontaneous Evolution,* we need more than just a theory of evolution, we need to make a better practice of it! Prosperity and the quality of life, and even our species' survival, hang in the balance.

An Aside on Criminal Justice

Some people have faith in the fairness of our American criminal justice system. I myself am an agnostic. I do feel strongly, however, that we should strive to do two things simultaneously:

(1) Foster a modicum more fairness in our society to reduce the risks associated with hard-nosed attitudes and heavy-handed tactics and discriminatory policies and the shackling of workers to their employer masters in an

unfairly extreme triumph of capital over labor. Greater fairness would help ensure that our societies as a whole would be healthier, happier and more secure, and this would create a much truer form of democracy!

(2) Sow a greater modicum of international justice to improve the prospects of achieving peace. An expansive perspective of this dualistic idea can be cultivated by pondering the perspectives expressed in the Earth Manifesto essays, *Sow Justice, Harvest Peace,* and *Reflections on War – and Peace.*

Try This Thought Experiment

Suppose you feel that you may be coming down with some serious affliction, so you choose to go to two doctors to get their diagnoses, and it turns out that the doctors give you drastically different diagnoses and prescriptions. You really want to trust your doctors, but when you are presented with two conflicting courses of action, you must assess which one is best. Further, imagine being in a country where the doctors do not adhere to the Hippocratic Oath -- "First, do no harm" -- and in fact they have many ulterior motives like profiting by pushing unnecessary surgical procedures and high cost prescription drugs, so you understandably are very leery. What are you to do?

First, you need to objectively evaluate the credentials and character of the two physicians, along with any evidence for what their motives may be, especially if they may be in conflict with what is in your best interests.

This is basically the situation all voters found themselves in, during the 2016 elections. All the Republican candidates for president accused the black man in the White House with having screwed up the world, and they tried to stoke fears about immigrants and Muslims and refugees and the government taking away people's guns. These ambitious politicians repetitively vowed that they would fix everything by bringing back policies similar to those pushed on the USA by George W. Bush, only more extreme when judged in terms of more tax breaks for rich people, bigger budget deficits, and efforts to reduce the collective bargaining power of working people and give more influence to the wealthy and big corporate entities. These perverse priorities were made worse by intrigue targeted to give less voice to minorities and students and women -- and to adopt more aggressive military stances on the international stage.

The Democratic candidates for president in 2016 competed by advocating more substantive proposals on how to improve our nation's prospects. They offered much better plans for fair representation for all constituencies, including more broadly equitable taxation plans, more honest approaches for addressing the far-reaching impacts of growing social inequalities, less burdensome student debt, more responsible protections of the environmental commons, more level-headed approaches in global affairs, and leaders that respect people's concerns and honors their best interests.

These choices are starkly different, and the messaging machines worked at full bombast volume, so it was quite confusing for some to choose which course to take. It was my hope, before the 2016 elections, that this Common Sense Revival would have cut through the noise with a good dose of plain truths that would help sway the American people to choose wisely. Alas, it was not yet to be.

The prescriptions for healing the patient are astonishingly different on the right than on the left. Hard right partisans not only fervently oppose progressive changes in taxation and better control of military spending, but they stand opposed to designing a better system for providing affordable universal healthcare and maintaining a strong social safety net, and guaranteeing reproductive rights to women and civil rights to gay people. They refuse to come to the table in considerations of comprehensive immigration reform, and they work to diminish women's rights and options regarding abortions. In standing against workers' rights to collectively bargain, they prevent working people from exerting a fairer modicum of power to offset some of the overweening, nearly unaccountable power of big corporations. Their stubborn opposition to environmental protections and smart action to mitigate the risks and damages caused by a greenhouse gas destabilized global climate are particularly dumbfounding. And when they prevent campaign finance reform, and work to gerrymander congressional districts and curtail voting rights of those who would be most likely to vote for more progressive policies, they make our political system less representative of the common good.

They also tend to support harsh punishment and lengthy incarcerations, and fail to support reforms that would

reduce the multitude of injustices inherent in our criminal justice system. Right now, there are more people incarcerated in America than in any other country in the world. The U.S. has less than five percent of the world's population, but something like 25 percent of the persons in prisons. And racial injustices are severe, with the majority of those locked up in jails and prisons being people of color. There are lots of people who have "earned" prison, but there are way too many nonviolent offenders serving unfairly long sentences. Reform!

A Clarion Call for Good Solutions

It is as easy as pie to be cynical in the face of deep economic injustices and ridiculously lopsided unfairness of political representation that gives the controlling few domineering power. And you just have to shake your head when realizing how monolithic the monopolistic domination of our economic and political systems is, due to the entrenched political duopoly in America today.

But good and simple solutions really do exist. Here's one. As soon as practicable, an Office of Public Integrity should be created by Executive Order. In a new tradition, a woman should head this post. She should have the title of National Ombudswoman, and the position should be a Cabinet-level job that reports directly to the President. The mission of the Office of Public Integrity should be to establish a system of Citizen Civil Grand Juries in every county in the United States, and of state Civil Grand Juries in every state, and of a federal Civil Grand Jury to be headquartered in America's heartland, America's Hometown, Hannibal, Missouri.

These Civil Grand Juries will be modeled after the exceptional system in California that recruits citizens to serve for unpaid one-year terms to help improve government by soliciting suggestions from citizens and then prioritizing them and examining the issues carefully, and preparing reports to the public on their findings and recommendations. This "watchdog role" of Civil Grand Juries gives citizens a voice in the function of their government, and puts a bright spotlight on issues of public concern. Civil Grand Juries thus perform an important role in citizen oversight of county government. They basically investigate, monitor and report on the performance of local governments, and often come up with excellent ideas on how to improve them.

Judges should be assigned in every county and state to select volunteers to fill these honorable positions. In every county in California, about 100 people generally volunteer each year for Civil Grand Juries, and about one-third of that number are selected by the Presiding Judge. Then about 20 of these people are chosen to serve on that year's Civil Grand Jury. These folks agree to commit one year of their time to work together with other civic-minded citizens to better the governance of their communities. Almost everyone who has served on a Civil Grand Jury attests to the fact that it is a rewarding and intimately fascinating involvement and experience, personally as well as for providing insights into the workings and value of real direct democracy.

The National Ombudswoman should be chosen in an online vote by every American who chooses to participate, from a field of three highly respected candidates selected by a consensus of the 50 Governors in the USA. The resumes of these candidates should be posted one month before the vote on an Office of Public Integrity National Intelligence Assessment Node website (OPINIAN), and these resumes should also be widely circulated in the national media, along with a clear statement of the purpose and mission of the Office.

Civil Grand Jurors at the State and Federal level should be paid for full-time work, and have three-year terms, staggered for good continuity, and they should be carefully chosen to ensure that they are committed to fairness. No politicians, extreme partisans or religious fundamentalists would qualify. And Federal Civil Grand Jurors should be given subpoena power to assist in their investigations. The Jurors should serve on one or more of 12 permanent subcommittees, including Education, Health and Social Services, Gender Issues, Campaign Financing, Environmental Issues, Foreign Affairs, War and Peace, Law, Finance and Audit, Pensions and a Bill of Rights for Future Generations.

An Aside on Happy Harbinger Goals

Forgive me, readers, for I have sinned. Some less than happy harbingers have insidiously infiltrated this intended paean to positivity. I intend to refocus the tone and content of this story to make it more positive once I fully grasp more enlightened perspectives. I am working on it, and will continue to update these ideas as I more fully grok paradigm-changing worldviews like those contained in books such as *Spontaneous Evolution*.

This book explores how we human beings, with our big brains, perceive the world -- and how different it may turn out that reality actually is. We should make no mistake about it: early-life programming and general social conditioning have profound effects on our brains, and so do the impacts of pervasive promotion and advertising. A barrage of images impinges on our awareness: devious propaganda is propounded astoundingly.

I am going through many Earth Manifesto essays and revising the tone, tenor and substance of the perspectives expressed to incorporate more hope-providing and heart-conscious understandings of reality that are consistent with those contained in *Spontaneous Evolution*. Meanwhile, this manifesto contains many answers for questions we've been collectively asking, and it proposes many win/win solutions to the major problems we face.

Optimism is a hopeful and positive outlook on the world and the future and ourselves. Optimism turns out to be good for one's physical health and mental resilience in helping us get through tough times. An attitude of realistic optimism can help us see big picture perspectives, and make things turn out better. Optimism and the practice of gratitude can even be good for our immune systems and healing. So let's look on the bright side of everything, and work together to make our world a better one!

Think about this. A 2014 Pew Research study of young people in the millennial generation found them "burdened by debt, distrustful of people, and in no rush to marry." But, despite all that, they were surprisingly "optimistic about the future". Think about this optimism in the context of the forms of populism that are being manifested in America today. This populism is characterized by deep suspicion of corporate, political and media elites, and it is revealed in the eagerness of young people who are new to politics to get mobilized, along with an expanding willingness of people to embrace policies that have long been on extreme fringes. On the right, this has meant support for discriminating against immigrants, Muslims and outsiders of all kinds, and anti-choice fervor against women who become pregnant. On the left, it has meant demands to better regulate big banks, and crack down on tax-dodging multinational corporations, and shift to a much more progressive tax system and get more serious about rectifying injustices and honestly addressing the need to prevent worst case scenarios resulting from climate destabilization. Bernie Sanders has promoted leftist ideas that have resonated among many Democrats, particularly young people. This is not surprising, for one study showed that between 1975 and 2012 nearly half of all the pre-tax income growth in the U.S. went to the richest 1% of households.

Surveys by the Pew Research Center show that half of millennials describe themselves as political independents and almost one-third say they are not affiliated with any religion. These are near the highest levels of political and religious disaffiliation recorded for any generation in the quarter-century that the Pew Research Center has been polling on these topics. "At the same time, however, Millennials stand out for voting heavily Democratic and for liberal views on many political and social issues, ranging from a belief in an activist government to support for same-sex marriage and marijuana legalization."

Americans millennials -- those born between 1981 and 1996 -- are approaching middle age in worse financial shape than every living generation ahead of them, lagging behind baby boomers and Generation X despite much economic growth and generally low rates of unemployment. Hobbled by the financial crisis and recession of 2008, which struck as they began their working life, they have failed to match every other generation of young adults born since the Great Depression. They have less wealth, less property and fewer children, according to data that compares generations at similar ages. The coronavirus pandemic is making this gap worse.

"Millennials have also been keeping their distance from another core institution of society -- marriage. Just 26% of this generation is married. When they were the age that Millennials are now, 36% of Generation X, 48% of Baby Boomers and 65% of the members of the Silent Generation were married. Most unmarried Millennials (69%) say they would like to marry, but many, especially those with lower levels of income and education, lack what they deem to be a necessary prerequisite -- a solid economic foundation.

Combine this state of affairs with the fact that students are being burdened with record high levels of debt for their educations -- and then face relatively high rates of unemployment and under-employment -- and it is easy to see why Millennials are justifiably cynical about the politicians who have contributed to making our society increasingly unfair. This is why young people gave such strong support to Bernie Sanders, who calls for revolutionary change to make our society much fairer. And this is why filmmaker Michael Moore made such a

strong case for smarter public polices in his entertaining and thought-provoking film *Where to Invade Next.*

A Closer Look at Iowa

Iowa Republicans have a long history of backing Christian conservatives like Mike Huckabee in 2008 and Rick Santorum in 2012 and Ted Cruz in 2016. But a survey by the Pew Research Center indicates that pious God-talk that is common with Republican candidates was actually more than usually effective in 2016, until the Trumpster managed to win using ungodly vitriol. More than 50% of Republican voters said that there is "too little" discussion of religion and prayer from political leaders during the 2016 campaign season (only 39% said the same in 2012). The number is even larger among white evangelical Protestants -- Ted Cruz's core constituency -- 68% of whom wish candidates would talk more about their faith, compared to 55% who said the same in 2012.

The reason this is so bizarre is that a sharper focus on substantive ideas about the positions a candidate intends to support would be much more important in informing voters about the qualifications and desirability of choosing a candidate to represent them than having a politician pander to voters by sermonizing about how faithful he or she may be to a Christian (or whatever) God they believe in, or how fervently they pretend to believe.

Jeb Bush made an eminently valid point at a town hall meeting in New Hampshire after the 2016 Iowa caucuses, when he questioned whether his opponents Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio had ever sacrificed any of their personal ambition for the public good. Surely Ted Cruz was primarily focused on getting attention and press coverage when he grandstanded on the Senate floor in a 21-hour long filibuster-like harangue in support of shutting down the federal government in September 2013 over budget issues and funding of the Affordable Care Act. This stunt led to a costly two-week long shutdown of the government. Even after that expensive disaster, Cruz contemplated a repeat of that government shutdown in September 2015 to demonstrate his extreme ideological opposition to having the federal government provide funding to Planned Parenthood clinics, which importantly help provide life-saving healthcare to needy and vulnerable women.

This nakedly irresponsible display of ambition, manipulative political calculation and scurrilous tactics may have stimulated rigid support for his scheming pursuit of power, but it is contrary to the greater good of society. Ted Cruz also panders to anti-gay zealots so vociferously that one liberal Christian group fairly criticized the stances he has taken as "bigotry wrapped up in the Bible".

"To God be the glory," Cruz told jubilant supporters after he managed to win the 2016 Iowa caucuses, partially by having used a dirty trick on voters in which his campaign propagated a lie about Ben Carson having dropped out of the race. Cruz briefly became the leading Republican candidate before trickster Trump eventually quashed all primary contenders, but God, I would think, would not have looked favorably on his use of dishonest tricks to gain power. We should not allow shrewd hucksters and political opportunists to use the name of God to advance their political careers and to hijack the electorate into supporting a socially regressive national agenda.

The outcome of Iowa caucuses has an impact on the choosing of our leaders, and it seems downright dumb in theses modern times to accept this influence, given that more than two-thirds of the voters in Iowa are evangelicals who do not fairly represent the broader American public. We should, of course, let people everywhere in our great nation believe in any God they want to, but we should not give some of the most gullibly delusional and fear-prone conservative folks in America the opportunity to exert an outsized role in influencing the determination of who should lead us in these perilous modern times.

Imagine if the states of Virginia, Colorado and Washington were the first three states to have all the candidates spend time visiting every single county, appealing to these more moderate voters, instead of letting Iowa, New Hampshire and South Carolina have unwarranted influence. After the near tie vote between Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders in Iowa in 2016, Senator Sanders declared that, "given the enormous crises facing our country, it is just too late for establishment politics and establishment economics." His candidacy had already forced Hillary moderately to the left on several issues like international trade agreements and income inequality, so his astonishing success was a positive development to the extent that he shifted the Democratic platform toward a less establishment and more fairness-oriented populist national agenda.

Marco Rubio had finished third in Iowa by wooing evangelical conservatives, running an ad in which he spoke of "the free gift of Salvation offered to us by Jesus Christ." I believe in a smart separation of church and state, and feel strongly that the American people should work together to improve the prospects for humanity while we are alive in the here and now. We should not settle for casting our hopes into the heavens for salvation in some imagined future life after we are dead, just as we shouldn't allow rich people and big corporations to stack the deck against the vast majority of people. The plain truth is that the most likely persons to experience either heavenly well-being or hellish conditions will be our descendants who will live on a devastated Earth, so we should give greater consideration to making decisions most likely to favorably impact them.

Public opinion polls taken in the wake of a last minute federal debt limit increase in August 2011 gave our representatives the lowest approval rating ever recorded in a CNN poll. Even worse evaluations were recorded after the October 2013 government shutdown in which Senator Ted Cruz tried to filibuster for 21 hours and many functions of the federal government were shut down for 15 days. The American people see that our leaders are often pathetically ineffective in their performance at the helm of our ship of state. Our political system is paralyzed, and our representatives seem to be incapable of acting in ways that are responsible to either the majority of people alive today or those to come in future generations. Many Americans are getting tired of the unwillingness of our leaders to seek common ground. We are collectively outraged that it seems impossible to implement win/win solutions, or ones that are more socially just than the status quo.

When a Gallup Poll was released in August 2012 indicating that the approval rating of Congress had fallen to an all-time low of 10% of Americans polled, one member of the House of Representatives at the time said, "We're below sharks and contract killers." This lousy approval rating of the job Congress was doing is as close to unanimity as Americans get. It shows that people want their political representatives to begin collaborating together in better faith to sensibly address national problems.

Actions Speak Louder than Words

I have a friend who proclaims she is a social liberal and a fiscal conservative. She generally supports Republican politicians, even though Republican presidents have consistently increased overall government spending more than Democratic presidents, and have also presided over bigger amounts of deficit spending and larger percent increases in the national debt. How have shrewd Republicans managed to erroneously paint themselves as fiscal conservatives when, in fact, they are the most irresponsible spendthrifts and regressive tax cutters?

It is instructive to see how Republicans end up increasing spending more than Democrats. They tend to rant and rave about the urgent necessity of cutting spending on domestic programs that Democrats support, but their meager successes in such efforts are more than offset by their eagerness to throw much more money into the military. The Editorial Board at the New York Times succinctly encapsulated the state of affairs in the run up to the 2016 elections with these surprising but true-sounding words:

> "For the past painful year, the Republican presidential contenders have been bombarding Americans with empty propaganda slogans and competing, bizarrely, to present themselves as the least experienced person for the most important elected job in the world. Democratic primary voters, on the other hand, after a substantive debate over real issues, have the chance to nominate one of the most broadly and deeply qualified presidential candidates in modern history."
>
> "Hillary Clinton would be the first woman nominated by a major party. She served as a senator from a major state (New York) and as secretary of state -- not to mention her experience on the national stage as first lady with her brilliant and flawed husband, President Bill Clinton. The Times editorial board has endorsed her three times for federal office -- twice for Senate and once in the 2008 Democratic presidential primary -- and is doing so again with confidence and enthusiasm."

When Hillary finally gained enough delegates to be declared the presumptive presidential nominee in June 2016, she became the first woman to accomplish this feat in U.S. history. She deserved congratulations on having gained the official nomination at the Democratic Convention in Philadelphia in July. Millennials gave strong and enthusiastic support to Bernie Sanders, and judging from the growing need we have for revolutionary positive

change rather than continuing to prop up the status quo or make retrogressive changes, they have good cause. Their interests need to be well reflected in the national agenda, and American citizens would have been best served by choosing more Democrats in Congress to get done the important business that Republican politicians in the U.S. Senate have been obstructing for years.

Another Viewpoint: A Fanciful Proposed Deal on the National Debt Limit

A good friend of mine who fancies himself El Gaviero (the Lookout) was captaining his boat near Cave Rock on beautiful Lake Tahoe's eastern shore in August 2011. We looked out to the northwest across the dark blue waters of the lake toward lofty Squaw Peak. Subliminal perceptions of cavemen and cave women, and the entire panoply of their respective behaviors, pulsed through the charged atmosphere as thunderclouds rumbled behind us. Ghosts of native Washoe Indians buried in sacred crevices of Cave Rock could almost be heard grumbling about highway tunnels blasted through the rocky promontory, but we moderns apparently decided long ago that we can ignore the sensibilities of our natural-world-respecting Native American predecessors with impunity.

Somehow the conversation on the boat had drifted to big picture perspectives and politics and deficit spending. El Gaviero, looking out smartly, shook his head pensively and proclaimed that there was only one solution to the National Debt Limit Crisis, which at that moment seemed to be so starkly affecting our communities, thanks to the self-interested, stubbornly uncompromising and grandstanding "conservatives" in Congress.

"There's only one thing to do", proclaimed El Gaviero. "We default on our national debt and give Washington D.C. and Newark to the Chinese. Throw in a cool place like Barstow for a kicker."

Ha! LOL. Let's deal fair and square with China, I thought, and throw in something they would really want, like Las Vegas. We should remember to bargain in good faith, after all. God only knows! I even gave momentary consideration to the idea that the Grand Canyon should be thrown in to make it a better bargain, for this would have been an appropriate salute to the perfect symbolic channeling of the Goddess of Poetic Justice, seeing that such a move would echo across the absurdly deep chasm of debt we have incurred by indulging in the intergenerationally unfair expediency of unprecedented levels of deficit financing of wars and low marginal tax rates on the highest income earners. But I rejected this idea in deference to my enthusiasm for protecting beautiful places, public lands, wilderness areas, National Parks and open spaces.

Then I thought, in a comedic puff of dust, that there's got to be a silver lining to all the dark clouds that are gathering on our human and biotic horizons. And there is!

Introspections into Tea Party Leaves

People have been striving to divine and tell fortunes from tea leaves for thousands of years. This practice is accomplished by someone with alleged clairvoyance that seeks to see symbols or omens in the patterns found in the dregs at the bottom of a cup of tea. This practice even has a name: Tasseomancy. Using a modern new method of enlightened divination, let us explore the big picture of tea parties.

Great economic thinkers of the past 250 years have strived to understand and explain the nature of economic activities in aggregate. In doing so, they have formulated some fascinating theories. Adam Smith claimed that an "invisible hand" propitiously guides market economies. Robert Malthus predicted that agriculture would inevitably be unable to provide enough food for rapidly growing numbers of human beings. Karl Marx expressed the conviction that "surplus value", i.e. profit, was created primarily by the productive efforts of workers, so that social justice requires workers to be treated more fairly. Karl Marx also advocated greater social justice rather than an overarching emphasis on industrial efficiency.

Joseph Schumpeter analyzed the dynamics of business cycles and described entrepreneurs and innovation as being part of a "perennial gale of creative destruction." John Maynard Keynes stated that the economy should be stimulated by the government during economic recessions by means of deficit spending, but he sensibly pointed out that this should be a short-term expediency that would necessarily require being offset by reducing spending and balancing the budget when economic growth recovers and the threat of a spiral of inflation begins to be felt, so that more fiscally sound policy is called for.

These great thinkers are being discounted by the demagogue-stoked fervor of people in the Tea Party and now "conservatives" in the Trump base. Why, one might naturally wonder, are these folks committed to ideologies consistent with a right-wing agenda that is socially intolerant, economically fundamentalist, and environmentally unwise? In 2012, presidential candidate Michele Bachmann assured the American public that, if she became President, "I guarantee you the Environmental Protection Agency will have doors locked and lights turned off". That was a radical anti-environmental proposal! And Donald Trump and Scott Pruitt and his EPA successor and their Republican cronies pursued similar goals from 2017 through 2021, as do Republicans in Congress today.

The Tea Party ironically constituted the most passionate political movement in the U.S. during the Obama years, until Trump exploited that movement's foundational anger at establishment politicians for his own narcissistic McCarthyesque advantage. Conservative politicians are an odd coalition of healthcare reform opponents, anti-choice activists, adherents to trickle down voodoo economic ideologies, Libertarians, climate change deniers, religious evangelicals, Creationists, "birthers", authoritarian followers, gun lovers, those who fear government, and those who oppose sensible protections of the environment. Wealthy people and their well-financed front groups have taken big advantage of such believers to get them to agitate for policies that are retrogressive, divisive and beneficial to millionaires and billionaires at the expense of the majority of Americans. At a time when we should be moving in the direction of solving big problems that confront us, "conservative" politicians have become a major roadblock to progress. Throw the bums out of office!

Politicians in the Tea Party, House Freedom Caucus and loyalist Trump base in Congress are preoccupied with torpedoing Democratic initiatives and reforms, but this helps engineer a more unfair society, and creates increased risks of an austerity recession in the process. Their shaky "platform" is incoherent because it contradictorily supports both higher spending on the military and lower taxes. It denies the risks of climate disruptions that are being recklessly caused by unlimited emissions of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, and it supports politicians who propose regressive changes in tax policy and a retrogressive social agenda, and promotes the idea that men are more equal than women by opposing fairness in pay for equal work.

Faithful adherents to this incoherent platform inadvertently help facilitate corporate prerogatives that allow large companies to externalize costs of pollution and worker healthcare onto society. They mindlessly go along with the rights of corporations to dominate "free speech", and they support anti-immigrant policies and are tacitly in favor of racial and gender discrimination. They support religious fundamentalism -- as long as it is the right religion; others are regarded as heretics or evil people.

A classic political "double con" is going on here. Conservative politicians pander to Tea Party folks and social conservatives and religious fundamentalists, and then use the support they gain to elect corporate enablers and economic fundamentalists to positions of leadership. In turn, these politicians use the power they obtain to raise lots of money, and they use these Big Bucks to push policies that advance the interests of a narrow minority of wealthy people at the direct expense of the majority of people.

Conservative voters, wise up! You are being duped, manipulated, taken advantage of, and double-crossed by shrewd operators. Subversive agitators have lit a fire under angry conservatives with their anti-government, anti-tax, anti-immigrant, anti-healthcare reform, anti-progressive and anti-science dogmas. These subversives are a radically different breed from the peace advocates and idealistic Berkeley radicals of the 1960s. Instead of advocating peace and social justice, they give strength to insiders who do the bidding of billionaires like Charles Koch, and shills for corporate entities like the notorious ALEC and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and right-wing think tanks like the Federalist Society. These insiders aggressively propagate deceptive propaganda.

Many Republicans pretend to be populists, but the policies they push are actually primarily in accord with the interests of fat cats. Republican ideologies are aligned with constituencies opposed to expansive ideas of fairness. They act as if they care about good management and the greater good, but they pander narrowly to rich people and the interests of CEOs and shareholders. They should instead give more consideration to the interests of working people and the majority of Americans. But because they are figuratively in bed with wealthy people, they generally oppose fiscally sound ideas, Golden Rule principles, ecological sanity and even sensible precautionary principles.

Republicans often toe the line of "purity pledges" and refuse to support increased government revenues for any purpose, and they punish any politician who will not endorse such pledges. They also threaten anyone who makes such a pledge and then subsequently makes compromises that accept any tax increases or the closing of tax loopholes. This purity curiously contains a distinct portion of defilement and corruption, and it appears to be pure pig-headedness, ruthless partisanship, dishonesty, and an anything-but-pure grab for power.

This purity, from one perspective, is pragmatic, since uncompromising positions were the best hope that committed conservatives had to undermine the presidency of Barack Obama. After all, by striving to paralyze the country and to prevent good solutions, they made the incumbent president less popular due to persistent high levels of unemployment, underemployment and wage stagnation. But this purity is much more like hostage-taking. It is ossified manipulative tantrum-throwing immaturity, rather than a noble Golden Rule willingness to deal fairly with all competing interests in our society. This purity is a form of reactionary political fundamentalism that is contrary to the greater good. Fundamentalism, whether religious, economic or political, is about power and manipulative control and strict adherence to doctrine -- NOT about honest ideas or fairness.

> "Fundamentalism comes from very primitive parts of us that have always been the default setting of our species: amity toward our in-group, enmity toward out-groups, hierarchical deference to alpha-male figures, and a powerful identification with our territory. This is the brutal default setting that all civilizations have tried to raise us above. But civilization is always a fragile thing, and it must be achieved over and over and over again."
>
> --- Reverend Davidson Loehr (paraphrased)

Republicans hem and haw and pretend that their ideologies are honorable and moral. They claim their ideas are full of integrity, rectitude, righteousness, and providential wisdom. Give us a break -- the emperor has no clothes! Republicans should stop obstructing efforts to manage our society more fairly. They should accept greater social responsibility and begin to help enact smart, fair and long-term oriented solutions to our national problems. They should stop acting as they have for the past ten years to obstruct every initiative designed to right the ship of state.

Extreme partisanship is sharpening distinctions between the two dominant political parties. The Trump faction seems to represent grave potential vulnerabilities, and the self-proclaimed "grim reaper" Mitch McConnell and his minions seek unity in perpetuating policies that benefit wealthy privileged people at the expense of the majority of people. This is a losing proposition for our country, and for humanity as a whole.

Our colonial ancestors bridled at taxation without fair representation. That is what the original Boston Tea Party was about. The reason they felt so strongly about being fairly represented was that they hated the despotism of the colonial British mercantile system. Social conservatives today have been duped into a fervor in which they think the federal government and taxes are the main problems in our society. In this, they have been deluded into believing the spin and propaganda promoted by wealthy conservatives.

Conservative "patriots" are incoherent in their ideologies because they generally defend hard-nosed military Keynesianism, in which poorly controlled and profligately wasteful military spending and debt-financed wars are staunchly supported, year after year after year.

I have a sensible message for such conservatives: Let's come together to hammer out consensus policies and champion priorities that are more visionary, broadminded and longer-term oriented. Let's focus our attention and energies on issues that are vitally important to the greater good, and to people in future generations. Let's try to transcend doctrinal convictions and dogmatic conditioning. Let's relinquish impulses to control and dominate and repress others. Let's breathe deep and exhale slowly, and resist the impulse to be obedient to the voices of fundamentalists, conservative ideologues and authority-abusing leaders.

Honest efforts must be made to solve the problems we face. We should make these efforts in the best ways possible. We should remember to recognize how wide the array is of competing interests in our society. Let us listen to others, and try to see things from other people's point of view, and be open-minded and empathetic.

Conservatives: Please help find a way for all factions to work together to begin honestly addressing mega-problems like deficiencies in public education, corporate abuses of power, high-risk and predatory Wall Street activities, the exorbitant costs of healthcare, social inequities, wasteful spending on the military, climate-disrupting carbon emissions, the rapid growth in human numbers in the poorest countries on Earth, and the exploitation of young people and future generations by powerful vested interests.

Let's demand that our government become a more trustworthy proponent of the people, rather than a patsy for the powerful or an expediency-addicted and wastefully profligate spender. The words of Swami Beyondananda echo once again across the interstices of space: We don't need more theories of evolution, we need to make a better practice of it! Prosperity, a better quality of life, and even our species' survival hang in the balance.

Tiffany Twain Investigates the Noble Assertions of Tiffany & Co.

Tiffany & Co. was founded in 1837, a little over a year after Samuel Clemens was born. In 2011, in keeping with modern times, this high-end retailer of diamonds and precious metal objects claimed to be committed to social and environmental responsibility. The company's CEO and Chairman of the Board, Michael Kowalski, wrote a laudable article that took a stand against gold mining in the Bodie Hills, east of Highway 395 on the dramatic east side of the Sierra Nevada range in California.

This issue was related to a modern day land grab by conservatives attempting to open up wilderness areas to private exploitation. Politicians in the House of Representatives were considering a bill sponsored by Kevin McCarthy that would have eliminated protections of wilderness areas and allowed development on more than 43 million acres of America's most fragile wild lands. Observers called this effort a "Great Outdoors Giveaway" because it would have mined beautiful public lands and undermined decades of conservation protections.

This land-grab scheme was similar to financial scams in which entrenched interests monopolize the nation's wealth. Both ploys are unacceptable as official public policy. Kevin McCarthy was Majority Whip of the House at the time, and he demonstrated a passion for whipping up public lands in a slurry of socially disastrous profit maximizing. McCarthy was one of the so-called Republican "Young Guns", along with arch-conservatives Eric Cantor and Paul Ryan. It's sad to have had such a cast of "young guns" trying to undermine the greater good with such perseverance and dedication to hard-right principles. A new calculus came to dominate political conservatism after the startling defeat of Eric Cantor by an even more radically "conservative" Tea Party unknown in 2014, lending a compelling twist to this state of affairs.

Even more extreme conservatives forced the resignation of John Boehner from his position as Speaker of the House in September 2015. Then Rep. Kevin McCarthy foolishly made a revealing gaffe about the Republican efforts to politicize the Benghazi tragedy, and was forced to withdraw from his advantaged position to replace Boehner. This development revealed the uncompromising partisanship of the House Freedom Caucus, and it exposed how the on-going takeover of the Republican Party was creating chaos in government.

But anyway, the fact that McCarthy attempted to allow a 43-million-acre land grab for private exploitation is stunning, and it casts a new light of shame on his opposition to Renewable Energy initiatives and his votes against a proposed Cap and Trade Program that would have assigned a fair cost to emissions of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. To help understand Kevin McCarthy's psyche, consider the strange fact that he played a clip from the movie *The Town* at a closed-door meeting just prior to the August 2011 debt ceiling vote. He was reportedly seeking to foster a sense of unity among House Republicans. In the clip, a bank robber says to his accomplice, "I need your help. I can't tell you what it is. You can never ask me about it later. And *we're going to hurt some people*." Cheers may have erupted from the Republican audience.

Hurt the American people to advance really narrow interests? This seems to be the overarching mindset of Republican politicians. There is Happy spin in this: once we see things in the clearest possible light, the chances increase that we will be able to make much better decisions about how to proceed in the most propitious manner possible. Broad-minded collaboration, not ruthless competition, may be the key to survival. Insanity has been defined as doing the same thing over and over again, and expecting different results. Let's go SANE!

Swami Beyondananda wisely contended, "Stick to your story and you're stuck with it."

People have been arguing heatedly about the theory of evolution ever since Alfred Russell Wallace, a commoner, and Charles Darwin, an aristocrat, courageously proclaimed that all species of life have descended from predecessors over eons of time through a process of adaptive evolutionary transformation. The stakes are too high today to be distracted by arguing about WHETHER life has evolved. It's high time now that we begin agreeing passionately on a better practice of evolution, an intuitive, practical, common sense, intelligently directed, positively adaptive and fair-minded evolution that will alter the unsustainable state of the status quo.

Alfred Russell Wallace believed that cooperation is the dominant feature of evolution, not ruthless competition. Today we are finding out that laissez-faire economic ideologies are having exceedingly undesirable consequences for most Americans. Let's emulate the 50 trillion cells in our bodies and work together to maximize prospects for the well-being of the whole.

The Time Has Come Today

Here is great news! We can take back our country by twelve primary means, enumerated below. Believe me, I know that a "Curse of Knowledge" can afflict the salubrious stickiness of ideas, so feel free to merely give a cursory review to this summary list for now. Twelve Proposals:

(1) Bring the national debt under control without imposing severe austerity measures on the masses. To accomplish this goal, reverse the markedly regressive changes made in the tax code since 2001, in ways recommended in specific detail in *One Dozen Big Initiatives to Positively Transform Our Societies.*

(2) Improve our vulnerable and costly healthcare system so that hospitals, patients, doctors, nurses and other healthcare workers are better protected, and strengthen social safety net programs like the Social Security system to make them more affordable and indefinitely sustainable. Recommendations on how to do this are contained in *Radically Simple Ways to Make America Fairer, and to Fix Both Social Security and Health Care So We Can Move On to Address Much Bigger Issues.*

(3) Implement the best ideas in the *Progressive Agenda for a More Sane Humanity.*

(4) Reform our political system to reduce the overwhelming influence of corporate lobbyists in Washington D.C. In particular, enact farsighted restrictions on the financing of politicians' campaigns by corporations and wealthy people. Move to Amend! Also, require disclosure of donor contributions to political campaigns, and put stronger Congressional ethics rules into effect.

(5) Adopt a Bill of Rights for Future Generations. This move would help ensure that we succeed in protecting the best interests of humanity in the long run, and it would also serve to prevent us from continuing to sacrifice the best interests of our descendants in future generations to primarily enrich the few today.

(6) Find sensible ways of establishing fairer protections of working people and the environmental commons.

(7) Implement a 2% Future Viability Assessment on all products and services to cover some of the costs being externalized onto society, so that there will be a "full cost accounting" inclusion of the real costs of making goods and providing services. The details of this proposed Assessment are spelled out in *One Dozen Big Initiatives to Positively Transform Our Societies.*

(8) Reverse the concentration of Big Media by requiring a break-up of enormous conglomerates that control television networks, newspapers, radio stations and online platforms. Also, take steps to alter the trend toward "too big to fail" corporatism in the banking industry by limiting the multiples of leverage allowed and raising capital requirements for the world's largest financial institutions.

(9) Reduce military spending, and create a cabinet-level Department of Peace to commit our nation to "soft power" initiatives rather than hard power aggression. At the same time, extricate our troops from so many overseas deployments and military occupations of other countries.

(10) Devote at least 2% of our federal budget to foreign aid, and target it to helping other peoples by reducing poverty, mitigating desperation and reactionary extremism, helping pay for family planning, developing clean energy, and protecting forests, wetlands, rivers, oceans, fresh water sources and ecosystems worldwide.

(11) Impeach Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas and/or Brett Kavanaugh for their ideological rigidity and deep conflicts of interest, and replace them with a Justice who is committed to the greater good of the people, instead of narrow prerogatives for corporations and wealthy people and social conservatives.

(12) Ensure that we make a national commitment to a fairer society and a greener future by striving to achieve a good portion of the goals specified in Common Sense Revival (and Part Four online of the Earth Manifesto).

Reasons that Progressive Tax Reform is Required

Consider three indisputable facts: (1) The national debt has increased by more than $30 trillion since 1980; (2) The net worth of the top 1% of Americans has increased from less than $3 trillion in 1981 to more than $40 trillion today; and (3) rich people are paying nearly the lowest tax rates in generations on their incomes and capital gains, and on their estates when they die.

In a very real sense, $30 trillion has been borrowed in the past 42 years from people in the future to give it to the richest few. This $30 trillion heist is a Big Cheat and a Big Fraud. A significant portion of the large additional deficits that are anticipated in future years is due to on-going insidious effects of regressive tax cuts enacted by Republicans during the presidencies of Ronald Reagan, George W. Bush and Donald Trump.

People are thrown in prison for the rest of their lives if they rob a liquor store three times in any one of the 25 states that have enacted Three Strikes laws. But rich people who are part of this $30 trillion class-action rip-off of our children, and theirs, are treated as though they deserve to have impunity for their grotesquely unfair participation in this all but criminal malfeasance.

The people who have benefitted most from this fraud resemble the robber barons of the late 19th century. In many respects, their success has been achieved by corrupting our democracy instead of fairly competing or providing superior products or services. Their success has often been achieved not through innovation or personal integrity, and certainly not through fairness to future generations. This state of affairs emphasizes the need for an overarching Bill of Rights for Future Generations to fairly guide our national decision-making.

The more that wealth is concentrated, the more power becomes concentrated. And as power becomes more unfairly distributed, the impetus increases for it to be abused. Where, one might wonder, are we headed? Better social insurance? Or pitchforks?

"Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely."

--- The historian and moralist Lord Acton

It was inevitable when Ronald Reagan slashed marginal tax rates on the highest incomes by a rash 60% between 1981 and 1988 that this fiscally irresponsible action would increase the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the few at the expense of most Americans. It was also inevitable that, when inheritance taxes began to be reduced under George W. Bush's tax cut plans, such policies would serve to lock in a financial Easy Street forevermore for heirs of the richest 1% of wealthy people. The writer John Fowles pointed out in *The Aristos* that the envious masses tolerate wealth in this order: most, they applaud wealth acquired after birth by pure luck; next, they admire wealth that is fairly earned according to the current system; and least, they are cynical about all huge amounts of wealth acquired at birth through inheritance.

People are especially opposed to concentrations of wealth that are inherited, instead of being earned through hard work or intelligence, merit, taking smart entrepreneurial risks or making positive contributions to society.

Our political system has been so skewed by moneyed interests that the outrage of socially-unaffordable low tax rates on the richest Americans has been concealed under a barrage of propaganda, subterfuge, and deceptive ideological arguments that advocate low tax rates on the highest incomes and biggest fortunes. It is foolish for us to have allowed inequality to grow so extreme in the U.S. This trend is strongly correlated with increases in the power of individuals and groups who have a stake in doing little to counteract the disparities between the Few, who have the most income and wealth, and the Many, who have much less. The manipulation of public opinion by the entities with the most money and power is a big factor in perpetuating this state of affairs.

Extreme social injustices, in all their many specific manifestations, are especially pathetic when they are harshly perpetrated by privileged people to selfishly gain more advantages at the expense of those with fewer privileges and less power. The sad irony is that many social injustices not only have harmful impacts on people today, but they also have unconscionably detrimental implications for the prospects of all people in the future.

It seems downright immoral for our leaders to create ever-increasing inequalities of opportunity, privilege, income, wealth, security, and access to healthcare. And it is unfair, mean-spirited and cruel to push economic policies that are designed to increase already glaring social inequities.

"Courage sometimes skips a generation."

--- The 2011 film, *The Help*

The Seven Primary Challenges We Must Honestly Deal With

Once we get through the terrible medical and economic calamity of the coronavirus contagion, we should reduce the national debt back toward the $20 trillion level that it was when Donald Trump took office. This should be done through a one-time wealth assessment on the capital assets of the wealthiest people.

Understand the extraordinary good sense in this action. By reducing the national debt, we will reset it to eliminate the malfeasance of Republican debt-financed tax cuts AND cover much of the cost of the calamitous pandemic and accompanying economic crisis. Thereafter, we will be able to afford to make smart investments in public health, better public education, a stronger social safety net, safer physical infrastructure and responsible protections of public lands and the environment.

Then, let's tackle the seven biggest problems we collectively face:

(1) The deterioration of the ecological foundations of our physical well-being and a related global water crisis and the risks inherent in massive extinctions of species on Earth.

(2) Changes in weather patterns and correlated increasing incidences of natural disasters that are being made worse by increasing concentrations of heat-trapping gases in the atmosphere. The human activities that are contributing the most to these harmful impacts include excessive burning of fossil fuels, slash-and-burn deforestation, and maintaining large herds of methane-producing ruminants like cattle and sheep.

(3) The strife that threatens peaceful coexistence and the mutual security of nations worldwide. This strife is made substantially more risk-laden by profligate spending on armaments and wars and the proliferation of nuclear weapons, and the U.S. having set an international precedent of initiating preemptive warfare that destabilizes other countries like Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Yemen.

(4) The fiscal irresponsibility of leaders in the U.S. and other debt-ridden nations and the concomitant increases in risks of heightened economic turmoil and potential recession.

(5) The inadequate upkeep of the physical infrastructure of the U.S. and the failure to invest in the well-being of people in future generations.

(6) The increasing concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the richest few, and a correlated diminishment of the security and prospects of prosperity for workers, young people and people in the future.

(7) Population overshoot and the dangers associated with wasteful uses of fossil fuels, along with a failure to put into effect smart measures focused on resource conservation, efficiency of energy use, and the development of cleaner and more renewable energy alternatives.

Sly Hands on the Scales of Justice

All Americans love the courage and ideals championed by our country's Founders, and yet every single one of the Founders, if alive today, would be horrified to see how easy we have made it for special interest groups to rig the system and usurp and abuse power. After all, the Founders had strived valiantly to establish the safeguards of a balance of power between Congress and the Executive Branch and the Judiciary, and between the Federal Government and the States.

But Big Money speaks loudly and carries a big stick. The Supreme Court even ruled by a narrow 5-4 majority of conservatives that we should give expansive "freedom of speech" to moneyed interests, even though this stance gives moneyed interests an excessive ability to manipulate and control our national planning.

This insight again leads us straight to the purpose for implementing a more progressive system of taxation. Here is the convincing rationale. Since Big Money has an outsized influence in determining the rules of our economic system, and since Big Money yields Big Power, overly heavy hands are laid on the scales of justice. These shrewd hands collude to manipulate markets and establish unfair rules. The result is a profusion of tax evasion schemes, regulation loopholes, subsidies for resource depletion and accelerated depreciation, negative externalities, no-bid contracts and exemptions from environmental protection laws and regulations.

Big corporations abuse the power of their size to the disadvantage of consumer fairness and small businesses and non-profit organizations. Big corporate entities exploit the system, often by making competition unfair through monopoly-like practices. Banks that are too-big-to-fail and huge conglomerates are one result.

The crux of the matter is that the interest groups with the most money have manipulatively rigged the system so that it gives them most of the benefits of economic activities. So a balancing mechanism is needed to counterbalance the heavy hands on the scales of justice and public policy-making that are being applied by rich people and top management in big corporations. This is one good reason why a more steeply graduated tax system is needed on corporations as well as on individuals. Such a plan would level the playing field a bit, and make fairness a truer cornerstone of our democratic republic.

Business taxes should be assessed on a progressive scale. All business entities that have gross incomes less than $5 million should be assessed lower rates of tax on their net profits, and bigger businesses should be assessed progressively higher rates on their net profits above $5 million. A plan like this would have a collateral benefit of diminishing the attractiveness of corporations to grow in size until they are "too big to fail", and thus risk requiring periodic bailouts by taxpayers.

Additionally, all corporations should be required to pay at least a minimum amount of tax every year on their net incomes to prevent many large corporations from evading the payment of any taxes on their incomes in any given year. General Electric, for instance, earned $14 billion in worldwide profits in 2010, but paid no federal taxes, and the company employs over 900 highly compensated tax lawyers and accountants to game the system to get such a benefit. Similarly, Apple Inc. develops creative accounting to shelter much of its profits abroad.

A Propitious Plan Enunciated

Oddly, the remedy mentioned in the Introduction to Common Sense Revival involves PROPER ACCOUNTING to address the burgeoning risks associated with high levels of deficit spending and record levels of national debt. We need not accept smoke-and-mirrors gimmicks anymore; we simply must stop allowing profits to be privatized while considerable costs are socialized.

Given that the smartest way forward is often found in the clearest understandings, the optimum solutions come from the best and most comprehensive understandings. Our capitalist "free-market" economy allows gigantic corporations to abuse the power of the undue influence of their wealth to gain enormous subsidies, and to evade paying taxes on all their income, and to indulge in the insidiously undesirable gambit of externalizing a wide range of costs onto society. Many significant socially disadvantageous effects are associated with allowing corporations to have these privileges.

Millions of individual buying decisions are distorted by allowing real costs to be externalized onto society rather than more fairly including them in the prices of products and services. Once again I recommend that readers refer to *One Dozen Big Initiatives to Positively Transform Our Societies*. It contains a Future Viability Assessment as proposed in the seventh initiative, *A Vibrant and Sound Economy.* This is a fair-minded proposal that would be effective in shifting all the significant costs of producing products and services that are currently being externalized onto society back to the products and services that are the source of these costs.

Many negative externalities are involved in allowing costs to be shifted from the prices of products and services to taxpayers and folks in future generations. It should be noted that there are also many kinds of "positive externalities", like the ways in which taxpayers provide funding for propitious investments in the public good. The most distinct examples of these positive externalities are public investments in education, infrastructure, healthcare, and protections of the environment.

Public investments in education generally cascade into future earnings and greater social well-being. They also cut down on needs for spending more money on social support programs for low-income people and incarcerating people in prisons. Increased investments in education lead to better prospects for employment and expanded kinds of job opportunities. And they tend to lead to a lower population growth rate, which benefits the capacity of natural resources and ecosystems to sustain us. Also, public investments in universal healthcare would lead to lower costs, fairer health outcomes, and a healthier work force. It would also give people some reassurance for them to become more confident in taking entrepreneurial risks without the fear of losing health insurance.

We need to find the political will to do what needs to be done. We should embrace smart thinking, cooperative problem solving, common sense, intergenerational fairness, empathic understanding and a courageous willingness to govern well. We can no longer let every public decision be made by K-Street lobbyists and corrupt politicians in Washington D.C. If we do not change this state of affairs, inequalities will continue to increase between the Haves and Those Who Don't Have Much. It's as if we are failing to realize that turning up the flame under a simmering pressure cooker with a malfunctioning pressure release valve could cause a deadly explosion.

For the greater good of ALL concerned, we should immediately implement a more steeply graduated tax system with fewer loopholes for the wealthy, as recommended by Warren Buffet, the Oracle of Omaha. And let's crack down on people and corporations that use offshore tax havens to avoid paying taxes.

These thoughts evolved out of the essay *Sad Implications of the Two Dueling Santa Claus Strategies in Political Economics.* At the same time of this development, I was reading the revealing book *Spontaneous Evolution: Our Positive Future.* This book provides compelling understandings of how we could be co-creating a more propitious future for ourselves and our descendants. It gives a good sense of hope for how we could be moving forward in positive directions. NOW is the time to start!

The Overarching Need for a New Paradigm of Human Perception

There have been four principal paradigms of human perception since the Cave Clan days of our early ancestors. Long ago in prehistory, Animism prevailed. Then came Polytheism, and later Monotheism, and then current day Scientific Materialism. Animism was a spiritually harmonious state in which early humans made little distinction between themselves and the environment where they lived. Every animal, plant, rock, mountain and living thing was seen as possessing a spirit, and all of the world's spirits were regarded as a part of the collective whole. It was a period during which humanity was emerging from a primitive but ecologically integrated existence into a new era of greater knowledge, but less unity, and more discord and less respect for our home planet.

Polytheism came into prominence 4,000 years ago. This was a way of regarding the world that involved a more sophisticated religious story in which intangible spirits were projected into deities that represented elements of Nature. Presto, gods and goddesses! Earth Mother Goddesses were primary in many early human concepts of divinity. The ultimate expression of this paradigm was found in ancient Greek and Roman deities that exhibited archetypal human qualities. During the time polytheistic beliefs were in ascendance, people began to feel disconnected from Nature. This has gotten worse as religious and materialistic paradigms have changed.

The next leap forward (that's debatable!), was the Eureka! revelations of Monotheism. Aha -- there are NOT lots of gods and goddesses, there is only ONE God! Unfortunately, most competing faiths claim that their God is the one and only true God. Holy books proliferated, and everybody's God, proclaimed in written words, shared one aspect in common: all tended to be moralizing disciplinarian males. In this dogmatic new era, the God of every other faith was regarded as false, and evil to boot. This has sparked terrible conflicts. Monotheism was a more sophisticated conception than seeing deities in everything, but it involved such obedience-demanding faith, and such harsh condemnations of a curious set of sins, and of non-believers that it became destructive. One

outcome was widespread and long lasting divisiveness, and enmities between believers and non-believers became much more pronounced.

The theory of biological evolution came along, providing a more sophisticated and accurate way of understanding life, and how it has come to be, than is told in holy book catechisms. Along with this more accurate explanation, Scientific Materialism gained great power, and the Industrial Revolution and economic competition facilitated rapid economic expansion and an astonishing growth in the population of human beings on Earth. It also tragically caused unprecedented environmental destruction and has led to mindlessly wasteful usages of natural resources.

Now, a new way of seeing the world is needed, a new existential paradigm of perception. The latest materialistic paradigm to dominate humanity's worldview does not give enough respect to the natural world and its crucially vital ecosystems. This is exceedingly odd, because the human race ultimately depends completely upon these ecosystems for our prosperity and survival. And we depend on the biological diversity of life on Earth that healthy oceans and terrestrial habitats support.

Every species of animal has its own animal awareness, it own appreciation of pleasure and well-being, and its own sensitivity to pain. It is beyond folly to allow the poisoning of the environment, the "paving over of paradise to put up parking lots", and the slaughter of wildlife in Earth's terrestrial and marine habitats in heedless obedience to domineering materialistic worldviews. The paradigm of human behaviors that is directed by marketing-stimulated wasteful consumerism is unethical in much deeper senses than all the admonitions of humankind's holy book moralities put together.

One of the biggest contradictions of our human nature is that we have great difficulty living the lofty principles we claim to hold dear. When we understand the contradictions of our nature, perhaps we will be able to more easily forgive ourselves, and others as well. This might be a key to seeing more clearly how to sensibly and feelingly control the impulses that undermine the vital greater good.

The new worldview that is needed must be accompanied by a reformed means of organization and new behavioral incentives. Let's give this new worldview a name: Life-Affirming Healthy Ecosystems Protectionism. This new paradigm will be one that gives greater respect to Mother Earth and is willing to protect the health of the vital ecosystems that sustain us.

A primary measure of our progress toward achieving this new paradigm and a sustainable existence will be found in our making a commitment to intergenerational fairness as defined in a Bill of Rights for Future Generations. The agonizing death throes of unsustainable practices and old ways of living are converging with the growing pains of new ways of being that are struggling to be born. In this condition, a variety of morbid symptoms appears and intensifies and struggles to persist. We would be wise to essentially re-program our perceptions and perspectives, and redesign our economic and political systems to adapt them to be consistent with the long-term greater good of the human race in its pursuit of happiness, its quest for pleasure, and its inextricably interdependent struggle for security and survival.

Alexander von Humboldt was one of the more honorable people in history. He was a German naturalist and world explorer who has been hailed as "the second Columbus". He traveled widely in South America and Mexico and Cuba from 1799 to 1804, and then visited Thomas Jefferson in the United States before returning to Europe to live in Paris from 1804 to 1827. He was an "enlightened discoverer" who published 30 volumes on the scientific findings he made during his travels in the Western Hemisphere. He understood the link between living things and their environment, and this insight provided a key inspiration to Charles Darwin, who called him "the greatest travelling scientist who ever lived."

Humboldt's science had heart. In *The Passage to Cosmos, Alexander von Humboldt and the Shaping of America,* Laura Dassow Walls writes that "Humboldt blended an Enlightenment-derived certainty in the agency of reason, factuality, and precision with a Romantic's enthusiasm for feeling and poetry." She says Humboldt spoke out boldly against American slavery and European imperialism, and took courageous stands against racism and inequities, and viewed nature holistically, and explained natural phenomena without resort to religious dogma. For these ways of clearly seeing, I give him a happy and hearty salute!

Voltaire famously concluded his great short story *Candide* with the simple prescription that despite all else, "we must cultivate our garden." The authors of *Spontaneous Evolution* tell another great story that has arisen like a hope-inspiring phoenix firebird rising from ashes, providing great hope that we can identify and implement ways of changing the world for the better and creating a new renaissance of hope and auspicious portents.

"*Spontaneous Evolution* introduces the notion that a miraculous healing awaits this planet once we accept our new responsibility to collectively tend the Garden rather than fight over the turf."

--- Dr. Bruce Lipton and Swami Beyondananda

Let us all embrace such broader visions!

Truly,
Dr. Tiffany B. Twain
Hannibal, Missouri
Latest update: November 1, 2022 (originally begun in early 2012 and revised occasionally thereafter)
Feedback? Contact me at SaveTruffulaTrees@hotmail.com

"Before my departure for the Elysian Fields, I must leave behind me what the Eternal Spirit has infused into my soul and bids me complete."

--- Ludwig von Beethoven, 1817

"The Earth Manifesto is destined to become the most widely read manifesto in all of eternity, or whatever is left of it before the End Times."

--- God (imagined)

Mark Twain introduced his great novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* with the following notice:

NOTICE

PERSONS attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot.

--- BY ORDER OF THE AUTHOR

Dr. Tiffany B. Twain likewise has a Notice or two to give readers of this manifesto.

NOTICE

PERSONS failing to recognize the good sense and sensibility in the ideas found in these writings will be judged critically, after a fair hearing, and people who give kneejerk denials to the providential value of the peaceful revolution and clear-eyed guidance recommended herein will be subject to being exposed as sycophants to the status quo, or treacherous frauds.

SECOND NOTICE

Frankly, Dr. Tiffany B. Twain is a *nom de plume*, just like Mark Twain was a sly pen name used by Samuel Langhorne Clemens. How this whole project came about is a long and evolving story, and one that is better left a mystery than being disclosed in the full scope of more prosaic actual circumstance.

"Who the Author of this Production is, is wholly unnecessary to the Public, as the important thing is the IDEAS THEMSELVES, and not the author. Yet it is necessary to say that she is unconnected with any Party, and under no sort of influence, public or private, other than the influence of reason and principle."

-- Thomas Paine (gender revised)

Real Live Experiments in Applied Trickle-Down Theoretics

October 2017 with a latest update May 1, 2020

"May you live in interesting times", goes an old Chinese blessing and curse. And the times we live in are surely getting curiouser and curiouser, especially in North American politics. A curious concatenation of circumstances caught my attention mid-way through the second decade of the twenty-first century, and I encourage readers to give it attentive consideration.

In Canada, voters surprised most observers by choosing the young Liberal Party candidate Justin Trudeau as their leader in national elections in October 2015. Trudeau won a come-from-behind landslide victory by making promises to progressively reform the tax code by cutting taxes on everyone's lower levels of earnings and increasing them on higher levels of income, and to responsibly invest in improving Canada's physical infrastructure. This vision was startling and upsetting to conservatives in the United States, who have been in bondage for forty years to misguided trickle-down tax cutting ideologies that primarily benefit the rich.

Chrystia Freeland, a Liberal Member of Parliament who won re-election easily in her Toronto district, made an essential point: "It's really important that people not approach economic policy as ideology or with quasi-religious convictions. Economic policy is about the facts and the circumstances."

In stark contrast to Canada's new direction at that time, Kansas Governor Sam Brownback foolishly declared he would conduct a "real live experiment" in doubling down on trickle-down economics, expecting to prove conclusively that this big boon to his wealthy supporters would also be good for the people of Kansas. But he proved exactly the opposite. He and Republican lawmakers enacted big tax cuts for top income earners in 2012, and since then Kansas has faced severe budget problems and has been forced to cut spending on schools and programs designed to benefit workers and poor people. As a direct result, he and his staunchly ideological Republican cronies were forced to raise sales taxes in 2015 that disproportionately impose hardships on poor people and those in the middle class. Any economist not in the Republican "movement conservatism" echo chamber could have told them that this would be the outcome of what is a persistently deceitful and inequity-stoking agenda.

Justin Trudeau was just beginning his own real live experiment in progressive taxation and far-sighted investments in a better society today -- and in a better future -- and this experiment in Canada will likely have relatively more positive outcomes than the ones people in Kansas are experiencing. It will also provide a revealing contrast to the economic and social disaster taking place in Kansas, where the negative impacts are adding up and things are deteriorating because of the Republican-engendered shift in taxation to benefit the wealthy at the expense of everyone else.

Justin Trudeau won the election with the help of a persuasive TV ad on an escalator. This 30-second ad, *Harder to Get Ahead,* became a YouTube sensation and was brilliantly effective in conveying the understanding that the trickle-down economic ideology is bogus. The ad basically explained Keynesian economics by featuring Justin, the handsome son of Pierre Trudeau, an iconic Prime Minister of Canada from 1968 to 1984, as Justin walked up a downward-moving escalator. Unable to get ahead on the escalator, Trudeau explained that the experience mirrors "what's happening to millions of Canadians in 10 years under (the Conservative Party's) Stephen Harper."

Harper's "ideas to give benefits to the wealthy but make cuts to everything else has made it harder for most

people to get ahead," says Trudeau, as the escalator jolts to a halt. "And Mulcair (the other candidate in the election) promises more cuts. Now is not the time for cuts." The escalator then starts up, heading in the right direction as Trudeau walks to the top and announces, "In my plan, we'll kick start the economy by investing in jobs and growth and lowering taxes for our middle class. That's real change."

The echo of Barack Obama's 2008 campaign motto, "Yes, We Can", reverberates in my memory. And I realize clearly that much more positive change would have been achieved in the United States from 2009 through 2017 without astonishingly stubborn opposition by Republicans to President Obama's every attempt to improve conditions for the middle class and the general welfare and the collective prospects of *We the People.*

With a similar bold embrace of progressive taxation and smart public investment and a more humane approach to economics in the United States, the American people could celebrate President Obama's accomplishments and demand that new leaders will come to power to take honest steps to actually achieve better outcomes for all Americans.

Trudeau's impressive victory over the conservative incumbent Stephen Harper was gratifying to all supporters of his Liberal Party, especially in conjunction with the success of many Liberals in their contests for Parliament. This triumph was also facilitated with an outstanding "Sunny Ways" whiteboard video presentation titled *An Economy that Benefits Us All.* This seven-minute video gives a stunningly simple and persuasive explanation of why progressive plans will be better for Canadians than the agenda and performance of Stephen Harper and the Conservative Party over the prior ten years. This video helped Justin Trudeau get elected as the next Prime Minister because it presented smart ideas and convincing logic in a way that effectively rebuked conservative ideologies. As Trudeau states:

> "Ours is the only plan that will invest now in what Canadians need -- things like good-paying jobs, reliable transit, and affordable housing. Ours is the only plan that will address income inequality by raising taxes on the wealthiest one percent so we can cut them for the middle class. Nine out of ten families will be better off under our plan than under Mr. Harper's. The Liberal plan will grow the economy, strengthen the middle class, and help those working hard to join it."

Charles Waterstreet, a prominent Australian barrister and author provided a trenchant observation: "Justin Trudeau preached that politics did not have to be negative and personal, and appealed to the better angels of our nature to win. He was inspiring. He asked the nation to get involved in politics and be optimistic and to have faith and to believe in hope and not allow the dream to die, as it can be a powerful force for change."

Justin Trudeau basically rejected excessive adherence to austerity economics and indicated that the Liberal Party would make smart public investments in Canada's infrastructure by running modest deficits for a three-year period. His victory proved that voters in Canada understand the difference between profligate spending and needed public investments. Championing the goal of rebuilding Canada's physical infrastructure, Liberals popularized the term "infrastructure deficit," and most voters recognized related risks and agreed that a time of low interest rates was a good time to invest in the future.

The aging and too-much neglected infrastructure in the U.S. is one of our "Achilles heels" in both public safety and international competition. After all, the prestigious American Society of Engineers has given the U.S. a "D" on its latest Infrastructure Report Card. These engineers give a "poor" grade to the state of schools, roads, dams, levees, inland waterways, drinking water, and hazardous wastes, and "mediocre" grades to bridges, rail lines and ports. So Canada is smart to invest more funds in maintaining and improving its infrastructure, and politicians in the U.S. are acting stupidly by preventing similar investments because of budgetary constraints caused by cutting taxes for high income earners and wealthy people.

A Big Picture View

A more comprehensive understanding reveals one of the main things that have contributed to "What's the Matter with the USA." There are very legitimate reasons for the anti-establishment sentiments that have roiled politics since 2016 and given so much energy to populist supporters of Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump. The American people's trust in their government has been seriously betrayed, mainly because of the degree that

wealthy people and their corporate surrogates and *Dark Money* have served to corruptly rig our system to benefit the few while severely undermining the well-being of the many -- and of all people in the future.

Sam Brownback should have known what is afflicting Kansas, for the native Kansan journalist and historian Thomas Frank had made it abundantly clear in his insightful book *What's the Matter with Kansas.* Thomas Frank provides a stunning explanation of how and why many people are goaded into supporting the economic agenda of billionaires rather than their own self-interest, or that of their children and people in future generations. A better understanding of these issues would be salubrious for all Americans, and could energize hopes of creating a healthier, fairer and more sustainable society.

In 1948, President Truman made the provocative observation: "Republicans approve of the American farmer, but they are willing to help him go broke. They stand four-square for the American home -- but not for housing. They are strong for labor -- but they are stronger for restricting labor's rights. They favor minimum wage -- the smaller the minimum wage the better. They endorse educational opportunity for all -- but they won't spend money for teachers or for schools. They think modern medical care and hospitals are fine -- for people who can afford them. They consider electrical power a great blessing -- but only when the private power companies get their rake-off. They think American standard of living is a fine thing -- so long as it doesn't spread to all the people. And they admire the Government of the United States so much that they would like to buy it."

A sensational film revealing this truth is *The Brainwashing of My Dad*, which explores the personal implications of the dangerous propaganda pushed by conservative media outlets like Fox News. In this documentary, filmmaker Jen Senko examines the rise of right-wing media through the lens of her father, whose immersion in it radicalized him and rocked the foundation of their family. Jen Senko discovered this political phenomenon recurring in living rooms across America, and reveals the consequences that it has had on families and the country. The rise of Trump itself is a product of decades of propaganda and the divisive stoking of people's fears and antagonisms, which has been spread through right-wing talk radio shows and Fox News, and in fake news stories and false conspiracy theories and character assassinations on social media platforms.

Neil deGrasse Tyson made this eminently reasonable observation: "I dream of a world where the truth is what shapes people's politics, rather than politics shaping what people think is true."

Brownback should have seen the laughable folly of his shrewd and ruthless but doomed-to-failure plans. He seems to have fallen prey to an extreme form of "confirmation bias" that contributed to overconfidence in his conviction in the validity of trickle-down ideology and extreme "conservatism" in the face of overwhelmingly contrary evidence. His poor political decisions due to such confirmation biases have had terribly high costs for millions of people in Kansas.

The intense competition between liberal political philosophy and conservative political ideology is interesting. It seems crystal clear that this choice involves having either fair representation of the best interests of the vast majority of the people or unfair excessive acquiescence to the greedy desires of the wealthy few. Think about this statement in the context of the real live experiments that are going on in the laboratory of states that lie just across the border from the Canadian province of Ontario. There, opposing economic plans have yielded a revealing contrast between consequentially positive outcomes of liberal economic policies and pathetically negative results of conservative policies. Just look at the neighboring states of Wisconsin and Minnesota, and a dramatic comparison of their economic trajectories in the last decade.

Republican Scott Walker was elected Governor of Wisconsin in the year 2010, at the same time Democrat Mark Dayton was elected Governor of Minnesota. Scott Walker slashed taxes on businesses and rich people, and reduced business regulation, assaulted collective bargaining rights of public employees and imposed austerity measures to cut public spending. The state of Minnesota did the opposite, modestly raising taxes on the highest income earners and making big investments in schools and higher education.

The outcome was amazing. Before the 2020 Pandemic scrambled the situation, I wrote: "Wisconsin lags behind Minnesota in job creation, income growth and even in the stock prices for publicly traded companies in each state. At the time that Minnesota elected Democratic Governor Mark Dayton back in 2010, there was a

Republican legislature and the state faced a $6.2 billion deficit. By mid- December 2015, state officials announced that Minnesota had a budget surplus that had reached $1.9 billion.

How was this turn-around accomplished? Taxes on the rich were increased and minimum wages were raised and a state law was passed guaranteeing women equal pay. "You know," wrote Walter Einenkel in Daily Kos, "stuff that Republicans usually say will end in a sky made out of fire with Jesus Christ riding on top of a horse, jousting with the ghost of Vladimir Lenin, while swinging a broad sword made out of fire. Well, at least in the case of Minnesota, the Democratic Party has been able to prove that using your government for good, to help the majority of people, versus the wealthy minority of businesses can result in both rich and poor doing better."

Separated by this deep gulf in ideology, the distinctly different outcomes for the general welfare of the people in these respective states brilliantly points the way to better practices, and they give a black eye, once again, to the greed-driven agenda of staunch conservatives. As Lawrence Jacobs, a professor of political science, has poignantly pointed out, "Evidence and common sense should matter more in our overheated political debates. The lesson from the upper Midwest is that rigid anti-tax dogma fails to deliver a convincing optimistic vision that widens economic opportunity and security."

An even more striking contrast can be found from 2010 to 2018 between Kansas, with its regressive actions under Sam Brownback, and the state of California, with its progressive actions under Governor Jerry Brown.

Every person who is familiar with the scientific method knows that in any experiment it is good to have a comparison case where contrasting policies are enacted. Conveniently, in this case, California voters chose an opposite course in 2012 from the experiment in Kansas by enacting a more socially responsible and civilized plan of making the California tax code a bit more progressive, with slightly higher taxes on the highest income levels.

The scientific method holds that the best way to determine the validity of any hypothesis is to subject the theory to a test and then objectively evaluate the results. So, fast forward a few years, and the results are in. And -- surprise!? -- Kansas is suffering hard economic times and big budget shortfalls, and California is booming economically, and is in unusually good financial health (relatively speaking!). California is an international leader in climate action, and Kansas stubbornly opposes proactive steps to mitigate the unfolding risks. And income tax revenues in Kansas have fallen by hundreds of millions of dollars, unsurprisingly to any objective observer, while a predicted economic boom in response to the Kansas tax cuts on top earners has failed to materialize.

When a theory is consistently disproven, especially in matters that are vitally important, it would be eminently reasonable to regard those who promote such a delusional theory with deep suspicion. The evidence on trickle-down theoretics is conclusive -- it is a Big Lie told repetitiously to deceive people into supporting charlatans who are serving as political shills for the rich, for the sake of their own selfish ambitions and purposes. It is disastrous that voters in the U.S. have not voted for honest candidates who propose valid philosophies, but instead have fallen for the manipulative ruses of those who champion the agenda of rich conservatives.

This outcome is severely undermining hopes for making our country a fairer, more sustainable place. We should rightly have sent conservative Republicans back to the Siberia of politics instead of enshrining them in the corruptly rigged halls of power. That way, they would have been forced to go back to the drawing board and contemplate more honorable approaches to big problems in the world, and begin to support truly fairer policies.

Further Incisive Insights

The Canadian election campaign was 11 weeks long -- the longest amount of time since 1872 for national elections in Canada. Meanwhile, it was more than seven times longer by the time U.S. national elections rolled around on November 8, 2016 from the moment Senator Ted Cruz of Texas became the first major candidate to announce he was running for president in March 2015. So the U.S. election process took an agonizing 78 weeks -- a year and a half! -- and the American people were real sick and tired of the intrusive barrage of attack ads, toxic accusations, political advertising, urgent fund-raising appeals, frequent political emails, rancorous debates, deceptive spin, blatant misinformation and misleading rationalizations that flooded the airwaves, especially in hotly contested battleground states.

Huge sums of money are being spent in our money-corrupted politics in the United States -- 'UGE SUMS! *We the People* need to demand serious and far-reaching campaign finance reforms in order to preserve our democratic republic, and Congress should enact a fair-minded law to overturn the Supreme Court's narrowly decided *Citizens United* ruling. It is time to *Move to Amend!*

The investigative journalist Jane Mayer explains how truly nefarious secretive "dark money" is, in her book *Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right.* It is easy to see, when you learn more about it, how influence peddling has rigged the system against the best interests of the people and is a menace to proper governance and a downright transgression against broad-minded decision making.

The fierce competition to win the Republican presidential nomination in 2016 featured a bizarre mix of bombast, insults, rancorous hostility to President Obama, unfounded ideological proclamations, excessive pandering to wealthy donors, gotcha politics, fear-mongering, belligerent militarism, scapegoating of Mexicans and Muslims, promises of growth-stimulating economic miracles, fuzzy math in sketchy and dishonest budget proposals, and misleading information peddled to the public. To help one of these characters achieve the goal of winning the powerful position in the White House, the Republican Party used egregiously underhanded means, including widespread suppression of voting rights of racial minorities and college students, contorted gerrymandering of congressional districts, and taking obscene advantage of people's fears, prejudices and absolutist religious convictions to gain power so that they could then impose an economic agenda favorable to billionaires on the masses, along with a retrogressive brew of "right-wing social engineering" plans. When Republicans win elections using such shrewd but sociopathic strategies, it would be reasonable to conclude that one reason they use them is because they don't have a chance of winning based on any semblance of fairness of their national plans alone.

To gain a clearer understanding of the depth of grotesquely anti-egalitarian bargaining that goes into the slick formulation of our national tax policies, recall the compromise that President Obama and Mitch McConnell made in private in December 2010, just before the huge deficit-financed Bush tax breaks of 2001 and 2003 were set to expire. McConnell drove a hard bargain, offering a one-year extension of unemployment benefits and a temporary stimulative payroll tax cut in exchange for a two-year extension of the Bush tax cuts. It is stunning how obscenely anti-egalitarian those tax cuts actually were. According to Ron Suskind in *Confidence Men,* "The total ten-year tab on the Bush tax cuts was $2.5 billion in so-called middle-class tax cuts, which went to most taxpayers, and $700 billion for those at the top making over $250,000 a year." Good God!

The bottom line effect was to give the top 2% of taxpayers a total tax break that was almost 300 times more than the amount given to the bottom 98%. The rich people who dictate our national tax policies obviously do not merely drive a hard bargain, but a mercilessly extreme, stunningly unfair one in which ruthlessness is maximized to an extent that is all but criminal. Shame on Republican politicians and their crony cohorts for this stubborn refusal to address the driving forces behind dangerously growing inequality in the U.S. over the past 40 years.

Paul O'Neill was Secretary of the Treasury when the original Bush tax cuts were put into effect in 2001, and he declared that tax cuts are not as stimulative as Republican supply-side enthusiasts have long claimed. He noted that they did not return anywhere near the amount of tax revenues that would be lost, and that it was unprecedented and irresponsible to cut taxes in a time of war. O'Neill was fired soon thereafter for his public disagreements with the Bush administration and its party line. He was fired, in other words, for being honest rather than obediently going along with deceitful Republican ideology.

After the 2004 national elections, Vice President Dick Cheney famously interrupted Paul O'Neill's warning that growing budget deficits posed a threat to economic stability with the words, "You know, Paul, Reagan proved deficits don't matter; we won the midterms -- this is our due." It's a curious idea that irresponsible deficit-financed tax breaks for rich people are perks owed to a political party because they have managed to win an election, especially by underhanded means. The brilliant American journalist Ron Suskind elaborated: "O'Neill turned out to be even more famously correct: the tax cuts blew a $2 trillion hole in the U.S. balance sheet, contributing mightily to the $1.1 trillion annual deficit that Obama inherited when he arrived in office."

Bill Scher provided a striking perspective in 2014: "The back-to-back Bush and Obama administrations allow us to easily compare the effectiveness of liberal and conservative economic policies. President George W. Bush's

record is highlighted by tax cuts largely aimed at giving the wealthiest Americans more money with which to invest, and a looser regulatory regime on businesses. President Obama implemented the Keynesian-style American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (also known as "the stimulus"), repealed the heart of the Bush tax cuts, greatly expanded the federal government's role in healthcare with the Affordable Care Act, and tightened regulations on several industry sectors including finance and energy."

How do the Bush and Obama economic records compare? "Let's start with the big issue: jobs. During the eight years of the Bush administration, there was a net loss of jobs, and the unemployment rate almost doubled, while there has been a net increase of more than thirteen million jobs during the Obama administration (as of 2014)."

"Never admit mistakes", resounds a stalwart Republican refrain, even though the illuminating light of historical perspective and revelations of caused-effect consequences cast a clear understanding on how misguided the values were during the George W. Bush administration, and how shortsighted the policies enacted were, and how contrary the actions taken (and not taken) proved to be, relative to the common good. From ignoring warnings by counterterrorism experts of possible airplane hijackings in the months before 9/11 to giving big tax breaks to wealthy people, to the refusal to include negotiations for reasonable prices for Medicare prescription drugs in creating a new entitlement in 2003, to rash ideology-driven deregulatory actions that contributed to the worst economic crisis since the Depression of the 1930s, it seems obvious that admitting mistakes and learning from them would be a much more socially important way to formulate providentially positive national policies.

Extreme conservatives in the Republican Party want complete control over governments in all 50 states and in Washington D.C., and many of the candidates that campaigned for the position of president championed the exact same mistakes that led America into a decade of economic instability, fiscal calamity, rapidly increasing national indebtedness, radically growing inequalities in income and wealth, aggressive use of the U.S. military, and widespread tragedies of the environmental commons and natural ecosystems. Deceptive propaganda is a poor substitute for honesty, and distorted information is a lousy substitute for realistic understandings.

Republican politicians strongly advocate spending more money on the military, and less on all other priorities. Their staunch support for increased military spending is like a gigantic make-work project that ignores the need for fiscal restraint and accountability in the Department of Defense, and smarter overall priorities.

Conservative politicians pursue their ambitions with a coldly ruthless Machiavellian calculation that in practical effect is subversive of the common good and treasonous to the general welfare of the people. It is for this reason that Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders declared we need a peaceful political revolution to overthrow the domination of our nation's governance and policy-making by Big Money interests. This call for a revolutionary change is more patriotic than the strident calls of all Republican politicians for a national agenda that would perpetuate all the mistakes made under George W. Bush that brought us 9/11 and the two longest wars in U.S. history along with bubble economics and earnings stagnation for the middle class followed by financial crisis and enormous bailouts and a hardship-wreaking spike in unemployment for years.

Our Founding Fathers would have agreed. Hear again, as if for the first time, what they said in the Declaration of Independence: "To secure these rights (of Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness), Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, and that whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness."

Several years ago I participated in a democracy-in-action annual meeting of a member organization where a number of contentious issues were at stake, and in which all members were given an opportunity to express their opinions and feelings concerning the issues. The meeting leader asked everyone to be civil and respectful in all comments made, and to listen to others and take the opportunity to be heard, and everyone agreed to abide by the majority decisions. I have similarly strived to maintain civil stances in the perspectives I advocate and the opinions passionately expressed in this manifesto. It is my clear-eyed hope that the uncompromising attitudes adopted by extreme conservatives will give way to more collaborative approaches for the common good, recognizing the urgency and injustices that characterize the modern challenges we face, so that we may

succeed in altering the dysfunctional aspects of our economic and political systems in sensible ways.

Governor Brownback and the Laughter of the Gods

Mark Twain lampooned human folly and pretensions with sometimes brilliantly sardonic humor, so he would have relished the foolishly confident proclamation by Sam Brownback that he would prove conclusively by means of his "real live experiment" that the trickle-down theory was an honest-to-God sure way to stimulate economic growth and generate higher revenues.

The indisputable outcome of Sam Brownback and Republican legislators having put a package of tax cuts into effect in 2012 was that this action regressively shifted the burden of tax to all people's earnings in lower income brackets. The Kansas Senate Minority Leader Anthony Hensley (D-Topeka) explained at the time that the net effect of this initiative was to transfer the tax burden from rich people to those in the middle and lower classes. Nice job, guys. A review of the actual Kansas Tax Tables confirms this fact: high income earners pay much lower rates today than in 2010, and all taxpayers pay more on people pay more on their earnings under $15,000 per year. That change was regressive, unconscionably unfair and ridiculously wrongheaded!

The Republican governor had gained national attention for his aggressive tax cuts, and he brazenly touted his experiment as a model for other states -- and for the federal government. But not long after Brownback was narrowly re-elected in 2014 for a second term -- by assuring skeptical voters that economic growth would preserve funding for schools and government programs -- his aides warned lawmakers that draconian spending cuts would be required if they didn't pass tax increases to fill the budget gap caused by a steep fall in revenues associated with their irresponsible tax cuts.

The sad upshot of the Kansas experiment is not only that it nearly bankrupted the state, but it also had a mean-spirited impact by detrimentally forcing harsh austerity measures to be imposed on the people of Kansas. Republican lawmakers should be deeply embarrassed and reverse course, but instead they chose to try to save face by increasing sales taxes, cigarette taxes and taxes on business owners and farmers in August 2015, to reduce ballooning budget deficits. Democrats in Kansas opposed these increases in sales taxes because they placed a heavier burden of taxation on poor and middle-class families while preserving the excessive generosity of the income tax cuts for rich people.

Societies face many daunting challenges, urban and rural, and the best plan is to have an effective government that is adequately funded to nimbly deal with all the gathering challenges that face people in modern times. Crippling the government and hobbling economic growth by giving big tax breaks to the wealthy does not accomplish this crucial goal. Other states have seen Kansas's experience as a cautionary tale. Even in South Carolina, conservative Governor Nikki Haley, a Republican, outlined proposals for cutting income taxes in early 2015 but said, "We are not doing what Kansas did." In Nebraska, the Legislature considered following Kansas in 2013 but rejected the idea in favor of a tax study -- which strongly recommended against big tax cuts.

The bottom line is that Sam Brownback's "real live experiment" has yielded definitive conclusions and PROOF POSITIVE! This experiment has been underway ever since Ronald Reagan championed USC Professor Arthur Laffer's cockamamie trickle-down theory, which had been shrewdly hatched by rich people -- and the sycophants to whom wealthy people pay handsome rewards -- to concoct such corruptly anti-egalitarian deceitful narratives. Economic policy should be about facts, circumstances and real evidence, not cunning deceptions!

It is exceptionally ironic to have seen all the Republican presidential candidates tap into working people's frustrations and anger and distrust of incumbent politicians, and their fears of terrorists, in order to use the support they gained to once again abandon the average American and advance a new round of regressive tax schemes that stoke class warfare by rigging the economy even more favorably for the wealthy.

With both income and wealth inequalities already at extremes worse than any time since the Roaring Twenties and the earlier Gilded Age of the late 1900s, as corroborated in Joseph Stiglitz' provocative book *The Price of Inequality* and Robert Reich's outstanding film *Inequality for All,* it seems bizarre that our political duopoly system can continue to give rich people overwhelming influence to set low tax rates for themselves. We need real campaign finance reform now, to remedy failures by Congress to fix this. And we need honest Supreme

Court decisions that will side with those fair-minded folks who recognize the vital importance of reversing the *Citizens United* decision. And all the provisions of the Voting Rights Act of 1964 should be re-affirmed.

The disastrous outcomes of Sam Brownback's "real live experiment" in giving tax cuts to those who make the most money have made Kansas Republicans look like idiots. "Conservatives" stubbornly stick to their story that this rigged ideological experiment in pandering to the wealthy is the best plan, though it seems obvious that personal enrichment is the main goal, and that retrogressive policies are actually a pathetically maladaptive form of obtuse inflexibility. But one must admit that Sam Brownback was courageous to put his ideological certitude on the line in the glaring light of the fact that experts outside the echo chamber of his blind faith could have confidently told him that his brazen stand would lead to his being rudely ridiculed, and that he would effectively be, as Shakespeare would have put it, "hoisted with his own petard"! He was, in other words, foiled by his own misguided plan, and worse yet, his folly has been extremely detrimental to the vast majority of people in Kansas.

"Everything is changing. People are taking the comedians seriously and the politicians as a joke."

--- Will Rogers

Republican politicians had remarkable success in election contests in the years after Barack Obama was elected president, gaining power in governor's races, state legislatures and Congress. Unfortunately this success has had a profoundly adverse impact on the lives of millions of Americans. Republicans have not earned this power in honorable ways, but by betraying the trust of the people through election cheating, pandering excessively to wealthy people, cynically opposing bipartisanship and striving tirelessly to undermine everything Barack Obama did to improve the nation's prospects for the greater good. This "success" has been facilitated by stoking anti-government sentiments, undermining voting rights, gerrymandering congressional districts, distorting facts, evidence and scientific understandings, and exploiting people's fears, racist antipathies, anti-immigrant sentiments, abject willingness to be submissive to authority abusers, and religious convictions. Worst of all, conservatives generally do not support reasonable plans that would help us cope successfully with big issues like improving healthcare, protecting the environment, conserving resources, mitigating the severity of unfolding climate catastrophes, or preventing the extinction of many endangered species of life.

Political Synopsis

Donald Trump and all the less successful Republican presidential aspirants in 2016 appear to have had one main goal: to get elected by championing tax cuts for the rich. The tried-and-true scheme of getting Big Money donations from rich people and giant corporations is a shrewd strategy that serves to funnel big profits into private pockets. To make big tax cuts for the well-heeled possible without rashly adding to the national debt, Donald Trump's plan assumed a basically unachievable 6% growth rate in the economy. Jeb Bush, less energetically, proposed almost equally big tax cuts for the wealthy and assumed a 4% growth rate to make his plan appear feasible. And both these politicians would impose more austerity by cutting programs that help working families in order to finance their proposed additional largess for the wealthy.

"Little Marco Rubio" proposed a plan that would have made big cuts in taxes on corporations and capital gains and top income levels, and would have eliminated tax obligations on rich kids' inheritances. His proposed cuts were so large that the New York Times creatively called his plan "the puppies and rainbows plan." Marco Rubio claimed that these enormous tax cuts would actually create a budget surplus "within the 10-year window." Really? "Absolutely," he asserted with completely unconvincing conviction.

Harvard's Greg Mankiw, who served as chief economist to President George W. Bush, described the idea that tax cuts boost growth so much that they pay for themselves as the province of "cranks and charlatans". Anyone responsible for devising a realistic and reasonably balanced budget knows that it is foolish to include wildly improbable projections of revenues in any budget proposal. The U.S. economy has not achieved a 4% growth rate since the year 2000. It turns out that the only way to achieve a 4% to 6% growth rate would be by putting into effect a radically different tax plan -- for instance, by increasing taxes on the highest levels of income and decreasing taxes for everyone on the lower levels of their incomes, and designing the plan to yield enough money to finance large public investments in infrastructure and education and greater good goals. Progressive changes in taxation stimulate economic growth and are beneficial for the general populace, and are "at the end of the

day" ultimately good for the wealthy. Regressive changes in the tax code, like the ones always being pushed by Republican politicians, contribute to relative economic stagnation, stoked hardships, and socially undesirable increases in the concentration of wealth in the hands of the richest people.

In a Republican debate between presidential candidates in late October 2015, Ohio Governor John Kasich blasted his rivals' tax-reform plans as "fantasy tax schemes." Not long thereafter, the Tax Foundation released analyses of tax-reform plans proposed by 6 of the Republican presidential contenders, and indicated that they all contained fuzzy math. The analysis stated that every one of them would likely add at least $1 trillion to the national debt. This was scandalous! These politicians were following in the footsteps of George W. Bush, who fooled the American people by promoting this same old Republican Santa Claus tax cut story, alleging in 2001 and 2003 that it would be the best plan to give huge tax breaks to rich people. These were on top of the rash slashing of marginal taxes rates on the highest incomes that were still in effect from the Reagan years. Not once in 8 years during G.W. Bush's tenure did economic growth exceed 4%, and it averaged barely over 2%. My incisive essay, *Sad Implications of the Two Dueling Santa Claus Strategies in Political Economics,* provides provocative perspective on the breadth of the treachery of supply-side ideological deceptions.

Here is a relevant passage: "Most damning of all, several authoritative economists have corroborated the stunning assertion made by Bernie Sanders that the top 0.1 percent of Americans have nearly as much wealth as the bottom 90 percent. In a speech to students at Liberty University, Sanders concluded, "And in your hearts, you will have to determine the morality of that, and the justice of that." If we really want liberty and justice for all in the United States of America, as so many people implicitly declare when they recite the Pledge of Allegiance, then we cannot allow the wealthy to grab an ever increasing monopoly on the nation's wealth."

The conflicts of interest involved in Republican proposals to slash taxes on the rich are glaring. Trump has been one of the greediest, most self-serving and unethical businessmen ever, cheating countless numbers of contractors and working people and investors, driving his companies into bankruptcy for personal gain on at least four occasions, and using lawsuits to screw people and take advantage of various communities. To succeed at these schemes, he defends himself with aggressive high-priced lawyers against those he has wronged. He pretends to be an anti-establishment savior, but has nonetheless blatantly chosen to double down on the trickle down Big Lie. His debt-financed tax plans will cost trillions of dollars, and cut his personal tax obligations big time -- if, in fact, he pays any taxes at all, given the outlandishly generous nature of tax loopholes available to real estate moguls and billionaires. This, of course, cannot be determined because he has the unprecedented gall to refuse to divulge any information about his tax returns.

Abraham Lincoln was no doubt right when he said: "You can fool all the people some of the time, and some of the people all the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time." Let all American voters refuse to be fooled any longer by devious and detrimental demagogic deceptions!

George W. Bush once notoriously said, "There's an old saying in Tennessee -- I know it's in Texas, probably in Tennessee -- that says, fool me once, shame on -- shame on you. Fool me … you can't get fooled again." His tangled thought process was abstruse, but never mind -- let's not allow ideological conservatives to continue fooling and confusing the American people into giving their support to a retrogressive agenda!

A central tenet of smarter and fairer "Middle-Out Economics" is that true economic growth comes not from the top 1%, but rather from the bottom 99%. Weak demand related to the economic stagnation of the majority of Americans has a negative impact on economic growth. Two studies lend strong credence to the thesis of Joseph Stiglitz and other economists who make the persuasive point that the poor and middle class have a "higher marginal propensity to consume" than wealthy individuals. Entrepreneurs should therefore prefer more after-tax income for the middle class, not more tax breaks for those earning the most money.

One downside of a more steeply graduated system of taxation is that it might have the effect of encouraging high earners to indulge in even more tax evasion schemes. But if feelings of guilt at swindling the government into ever more fiscally irresponsible straits does not inspire honest compliance, at least the force of law would make this cunning strategy more risky and filled with potential adverse consequences for tax evasion.

It is sad that most Republican dogmas are in actual fact simply aimed at securing more wealth for the richest Americans. People who want to participate in the American Dream need a safety net to fall back on, so health care shouldn't be tied to employment, and unemployment benefits should be adequate, and education should be less expensive, and students should not be burdened with such heavy debt, and national policies should be shifted significantly to favor the strengthening of the middle-class.

> "Mark Twain expressed moral outrage at wickedness in his times. He derided the gluttony of the Gilded Age and criminal malfeasance in the business world, and voiced strong opposition to American military adventurism abroad, and mocked people's absurd foibles and peccadilloes. It is healthy for us to laugh at the foolishness of our similar foibles in today's world. But while we are chuckling to ourselves, we should remember that our most important legacy to our heirs should be to "pay forward" some good deeds to offset the damages that our collective activities are causing to their prospects, and to the planet. Let's just do it!"
>
> --- *Sad Implications of the Two Dueling Santa Claus Strategies in Political Economics*

In the illuminating book, *They're Not Even Close: The Democratic vs. Republican Economic Records, 1910-2010*, it is shown that the Democratic and Republican Parties are virtual opposites of each other in their economic records, going back to the earliest period for which economic data were available in 1910. More than a dozen studies have been done comparing economic growth, unemployment, average length of unemployment, stock market performance, inflation, federal debt, and other economic indicators during Democratic and Republican presidencies and congresses, and they all show stunningly better performance when Democrats are in power than when Republicans are in power. This understanding should settle, once and for all, the question of whether there's any significant economic difference between the two Parties. Yes, there is a surprisingly big difference, and it always runs in favor of Democrats in power. There might be other reasons for voting for Republican politicians, but all of the economic reasons favor voting for Democrats.

Ideas should stand on their own merits, not on a fictionalized distortion of the truth of the matter. Ideas and national policies should be evaluated using clear-eyed consequential ethical understandings, and they should honor the common good and social justice and fair-mindedness.

According to economist Paul Krugman, "The arithmetic on partisan differences is actually stunning. Last year the economists Alan Blinder and Mark Watson circulated a paper comparing economic performance under Democratic and Republican presidents since 1947. Under Democrats, the economy grew, on average, 4.35 percent per year; under Republicans, only 2.54 percent. Over the whole period, the economy was in recession for 49 quarters; and Democrats held the White House during only 8 of those quarters."

Policies promoting austerity in the wake of the economic crisis of 2008 had disastrous effects, going far beyond the jobs and income lost in the first few years. In fact, according to Paul Krugman, the long-term damage caused by cutting spending "is easily big enough to make austerity a self-defeating policy even in purely fiscal terms: Governments that slashed spending in the face of depression hurt their economies, and hence their future tax receipts, so much that even their debt will end up higher than it would have been without the cuts."

When the sudden 2020 Pandemic economic crisis struck, states, which are required to balance their budgets, needed federal funding to prevent widespread layoffs of essential government employees, but Mitch McConnell, for his own greedy self-serving power-hungry purposes, diabolically proposed letting states go into bankruptcy.

Astonishingly, all the Republican candidates for president in 2016 fawningly adopted ideological blinders and proclaimed that the trickle-down theory of supply-side economics is gospel truth, despite the proof that Sam Brownback has demonstrated that this form of voodoo economics is more a Big Lie than based in fact. Sam Brownback was Governor of Kansas starting in January 2011, and early on when he asserted he would conduct a "real live experiment" to prove that trickle-down economics works for the betterment of everyone, I wondered, "What concoction of spiked Kool-Aid could he have been drinking to have believed this ideological subterfuge was really true?" After all, facts indicate that this belief is a transparently deceptive rationale that has already been disproven by decades of experience and statistics and circumstantial evidence that reveal it to be dishonest propaganda disseminated by pawns of the wealthy.

One might have thought that Sam Brownback did a big favor to the phalanx of Republican presidential candidates who aspired to win the presidency in the 2016 elections. Since Brownback has exposed the profound folly of his "real live experiment" in supply-side economics in Kansas, a clearer perspective is available to guide us to better public policies. It seems obvious to an independent observer that Brownback conducted this experiment for one specific reason. He knew from direct experience that it would have the great personal advantages for religiously unprincipled Republican politicians of generating lavish financial support from wealthy donors in our *Citizens Divided* political system. And sure enough, the notoriously anti-progressive billionaires Charles and David Koch of Wichita made out like robber barons from the corruptly inequitable tax realignment policy as a result of these influence-abusing "investments".

It must be admitted that Republicans have a simpler and more lucrative plan for fundraising than Democrats. Think about it. Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush (and governors like Sam Brownback) have given trillions of dollars in tax breaks to the wealthiest 1%, and thereby made it easy to raise hundreds of millions of dollars from these wealthy people to support socially unjust policies and these politicians' political careers. Democrats, on the other hand, strive to invest in opportunity and infrastructure, and strengthen the social safety net, and protect the environment -- and this generates many small donations, but generally not as much money as the cynically shrewd Republican strategy. Money is power, and excessive power corrupts.

Rich people contributed record amounts of money to 2016 presidential campaigns, helping enable Republicans to gain unfair advantages in their contests in our national elections. The *Citizens United* ruling is proving to be exceedingly subversive of our democracy. One particularly pathetic outcome of this narrow decision is that wealthy individuals and corporations that are engaged in polluting activities have flooded our political system with money, and they are spending enormous amounts on campaign contributions to politicians with dismal voting records on things like clean energy, protecting clean water and clean air, and mitigating the impacts of global warming. A healthy democracy with a free press and an independent judiciary is essential to a healthy natural environment, so when we allow our nation's founding principles to be corrupted by wealthy interest groups, both democratic fairness and environmental sanity are sabotaged.

<u>The Role of the Supreme Court, and Charles and David Koch, in this Charade</u>

Why did Republicans so adamantly block President Obama's nominee to replace the corporate-friendly Antonin Scalia on the Supreme Court? To find the real answer to this question, we need to see who such obstruction really serves. We need to "follow the money!" The answer to that question leads straight to the donor base of the Republican Party. The Republican Senate and to an even greater extent the Republican House of Representatives primarily serves the economic interests of a tiny group of very wealthy people. These people stood to either lose billions of dollars spent complying with environmental, finance and labor laws and regulations if anyone other than a staunch ideological conservative replaced Scalia. That is what the fight was all about. "For the GOP and the billionaires who pull their strings, much ballyhooed rhetoric about abortion, affirmative action, union rights and voting rights are all subsidiary to this main event."

The most prominent members of this small group of people are arch-conservative Kansas billionaires Charles Koch and the since-deceased David Koch. In the 2016 election cycle, the Kochs publicly stated that they and their compatriots intended to spend almost $900 million, more than either the Republican or Democratic parties spent in 2012. According to an analysis in *Politico*, the Koch's privatized political network is backed by a group of several hundred extremely rich fellow donors who often meet at off-the-record conclaves organized by the Kochs at desert resorts. This political machine has at least 1,200 full-time staffers in 107 offices nationwide, or more than three times as many as the Republican National Committee. Charles and David Koch may be the most influential unelected political figures in U.S. history, and they are abusing the influence of their *Dark Money* for very dark purposes.

Soon after conservative Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia died in February 2016, a spokesman for a far-right group tried to explain the rationale for opposing any nominee to the Court that President Obama would make: "The very fact that people on our side feel very strongly that there shouldn't be a hearing before we know the nominee is because it's not really about the nominee. ... Frankly, the real objection here is to Obama."

That admission is truly stunning! The Republican stalwart Senator Orrin Hatch from Utah came up with a weak though superficially plausible rationalization for Republicans to refuse to even consider the person President Obama would not long thereafter nominate to replace Scalia: "My personal feeling is ... that it would be better to not even have hearings. We are in the midst of one of the most obnoxious, terrible presidential campaigns that I've ever seen. I don't want to see the courts be smeared by being in the middle of the process."

Ha! Joan McCarter, Senior Political Writer for Daily Kos, eviscerated this logic with these satiric words: "Right. It's all about protecting the institutions of the Senate and the Court, and all about saving the potential nominee from what could be a "demeaning" process. Of course, Orrin Hatch has got no problem trashing the institution of the presidency and subverting Obama's constitutional duty to fill Supreme Court seats and thereby demeaning this president. That's perfectly fine. But, boy, we don't want the Senate to look bad."

This is a real travesty of justice. Patriotic Americans should have demanded that U.S. Senators fulfill their constitutional responsibility. Partially by engaging in this unprecedented ploy, Republicans have gained more unaccountable power, and will have an easier time now to undo everything the black man in the White House accomplished during his 8 years in office. They will likely put us on a path to more wars and economic crises, and "put women in their subservient place, the brazen hussies -- and give a lasting victory to capitalists in their long-fought efforts to gain dominating influence over working people, the lazy moochers and complainers."

Unjust and wrong-headed laws tend to breed disrespect for government, so when we allow corruption in politics and widespread inequities, it tends to breed an undesirable disdain and disrespect for the law. Our top national priority should be a healthier and safer world for all Americans. This cannot be achieved by letting the richest 1% gain an increasing portion of the national wealth while imposing austerity on everyone else. The cost of social insurance policies that reduce inequities would be much lower than the high costs of vulnerabilities to natural disasters and pandemics, or revolutionary discord and harsh incarceration policies at home, or of aggressive military policies abroad.

Realistic Understanding

In Canada, when the Conservative Party ruled, it tried to silence scientists and deny facts and the best scientific understandings. The Conservative Party sets itself in glaring contrast to the Liberal Party by deviously denying scientific knowledge, instead of taking it into consideration. "The war on science ends with the Liberal government", declared Justin Trudeau in a speech in Vancouver before the election. He was referring to tactics that were used by Canada's Conservative Party, which included assaulting reason and science by censoring government scientists, eliminating data monitoring programs, shuttering scientific libraries, chopping budgets, and depriving decision makers of vital scientific information on multiple environmental and public health issues. Watch the sensational documentary *Silence of the Labs* to better understand these issues.

In startling parallel, conservatives in the USA use tactics that are disturbingly similar to those of the failed Conservative Party in Canada. They attempt to deny the best scientific understandings when such knowledge is inconvenient to powerful interests like the billionaire Koch brothers, Big Oil companies and conservative religious fundamentalists. Politicians in the House Freedom Caucus, in particular, are beholden to Charles Koch and his ilk, who want to subvert our politics even further for their own gain in profits and power and ability to take maximum advantage of workers by minimizing their collective bargaining rights. And they are zealously eager to repeal regulations and use up resources and damage the environment, while socializing many costs.

Michael Moore's outstanding film *Where to Invade Next* provided a funny look at a brilliant, simple plan -- seeking the best ideas in other countries to bring them back to the United States to improve our society. Ironically, Michael Moore often found that the best ideas in other countries originated in the U.S., and we have merely forsaken them in the internecine political struggle by vested interest groups to maximize their own narrow advantages. It is curious, then, that the "war on science" employed in Canada may actually be a bad idea for guiding national strategies that our good neighbors to the north have imported from us.

Another pathological aspect of conservative politicians is their obsequious pandering to the military-industrial complex and the NRA. In this cowardly deference, they are in effect supporting risk-laden international

aggression along with easy availability of guns to anyone and everyone, including even those who are on "the terrorist watch list". They do this apparently because they want to help gun manufacturers make bigger profits, despite the fact that this tactic emphasizes profit making as being much more important than public safety and reducing deaths caused by gun violence.

A bipartisan bill was proposed in the wake of the Sandy Hook massacre of school children and teachers that would have closed the background check loophole at gun shows, and on Internet sales. When the NRA shut the legislation down, Senator Elizabeth Warren observed: "I stood on the floor of the United States Senate, stunned and appalled. I thought: What has happened to this country? What has happened to this democracy that one interest group can put the entire country at risk? Where is our political courage?" We rightly should have asked this question again, with determination, after the Las Vegas massacre on October 1, 2017 in which a man with dozens of weapons killed 58 people and injured more than 800. One bizarre Republican response to this tragedy was to try to loosen restrictions on gun silencers soon after!

The Hard Times Swindle of Conservatism

Religious social conservatism has been surprisingly strong in the past few decades, despite its increasing extremism. One of the biggest political mysteries in modern times is how conservatism, once a marker of class privilege, could have been adopted as the creed of millions of Americans in recent years. It is a real source of fascination that, more than 240 years after our Founders courageously declared independence and championed fair-minded democratic principles, this powerful contrary force of extreme economic and social conservatism has gained such strength on the political scene. One might wonder what the matter is with America that it allows this force to gain so much overwhelming influence. Why have radical conservatives been able to gain power and advance a narrow agenda that adversely affects the average American in such profound ways?

To understand this development, author Thomas Frank, the astute native of Kansas, set out to explore the reasons why people in Kansas in recent decades have been anomalously acting in ways that are glaringly contrary to their own economic self-interests. He saw that millions of Americans have given support to conservative politicians, particularly in Kansas and the rest of the Midwest and the South, and he asked the poignant question, *What's the Matter with Kansas?*

Amazingly, people in Kansas 100 years ago were liberal defenders of the best interests of working folks and farmers. Today, however, the majority of Kansans tend to oppose policies that help ensure the greater good of blue-collar workers, small farmers, poor people and folks in the middle class. They instead support conservative Christian Right politicians and the agendas of established interests promoted by wealthy people and large agribusinesses and huge corporations like Koch Industries of Wichita, which is owned by those danged archconservative billionaires Charles and David Koch.

Thomas Frank's compelling question yielded an interesting explanation. An intense marketing blitz barrage of ideological brainwashing has undermined once fair-minded economic and social sensibilities. This propaganda has been generated by narrowly focused economic elites to stoke people's resentments and hijack their emotions, and to shrewdly marshal their cultural anger for the purpose of giving powerful impetus to unrelated economic policies that radically favor the goals of big business interests and wealthy people instead of small businesses and the common good. The simple fact of the matter is that we need to develop more honorable national priorities that are much fairer to the vast majority of the American people.

Our national priorities are severely distorted by this hijacking of our economic and political systems by shrewd operatives whose main goal is to enhance the perks, prerogatives and rewards of wealthy people. One of the most insidious misguiding gimmicks they use to achieve their goals involves allowing corporations to maximize private profits by socializing costs, thereby foisting risks and obligations onto others. The outcome of such activities is to further increase the concentration of wealth in the hands of a relatively small number of rich people. Too many extreme partisans among these highly privileged Americans indulge in overly self-serving, greed-driven, and inadequately empathetic attitudes toward others. In the process, the stability, soundness and sustainability of economic activities are being sacrificed, along with the overall well-being of the people and the health of the environment.

Economic fundamentalists advocate a much more laissez-faire system of corporate capitalism. But many of our daunting economic, social and environmental dilemmas are made worse by the success of ideologues who rigidly espouse deceitful ideas like these. It seems stunning to me that people who fervently support fundamentalist economic policies are so easily able to take advantage of people's anger over hot button social issues and then utilize these divisive issues to achieve an overriding goal of ensuring that rich people are allowed to pay historically low tax rates on the highest levels of their incomes.

By seeking to achieve their narrowly focused goals through the use of propaganda and emotional hijacking, these ideologues often use egregiously unethical and demagogic means to gain power. One of the main ways they have achieved their goals has

been by stoking people's cultural anger and fears, misunderstandings, frustrations, prejudices, partisan political views and intolerant religious sensibilities.

"Anger and intolerance are the enemies of correct understanding."

--- Mahatma Gandhi

Deceptive spin has been used to fool people into giving more power to shrewd conservative politicians, who pay back their financial benefactors by engaging in debt-financed regressive tax swindles that primarily benefit rich people. These politicians always seem to be trying to find ways to give big corporations more privileges, perks, influence, subsidies, low wage costs, lax regulations, opportunities to evade taxes, and narrowly advantageous international trade deal provisions. To find a really sensational confirmation of the validity of these contentions, read on.

A Classic Case of Conservative Ideology Temporarily Triumphing over Liberal Ideas

Sam Brownback and fellow Republicans are obtusely unwilling to admit the fact that cutting taxes on rich people has caused calamitous shortfalls. Get out of your echo chamber, Sam! Even a poorly educated high school student could tell you that reducing taxes would reduce tax revenues. Instead, Brownback bizarrely blamed the black guy in the White House for the red ink, which he and his cronies directly caused, and for the depressed business environment in Kansas. "The failed economic policies of the Obama administration are affecting states throughout the nation," claimed Brownback. "It is more important than ever that we continue our focus on growing jobs and creating a business-friendly environment that benefits Kansans," he deceitfully added.

Statistics are proving that Brownback and his economic policies are bad for business and wrong for the majority of the people. The real agenda of giving high-income earners a much bigger share of the Midwestern economic pie is to get rich donors to give Republican politicians huge sums of money, but sadly for the people of Kansas, the detrimental outcome of this experiment has exposed the folly of such actions. "Heck of a job, Brownie."

The real failure here is one of Republican ideology. Supply-side "voodoo economics" and the trickle-down theory are deeply dishonest. Most other states fared much better than Kansas in the long economic recovery from the 2008 recession, and the annual U.S. deficit fell every year as a share of the economy during Barack Obama eight years in office. Trump? Worse year after year after year.

"Kansas cuts taxes on the rich, and its revenues fall through the floor. That's Obama's fault, according to the governor," wrote Professor Ian Reifowitz in *Daily Kos*. Obama raised taxes on the rich (by means of a small increase in tax rates on annual incomes exceeding $400,000 per year), and this resulted in increasing federal revenues and a decreasing federal deficit. "Anybody seeing a disconnect here? I know Brownback has worked hard to weaken public education in Kansas. I guess he figures if no one in the state is educated, they won't be able to figure out he's been pulling the wool over their eyes." LOL.

A recent comprehensive study showed that states that kowtow to conservative ideological approaches to economic policy have weaker economic growth than those that don't. "But we can even get more specific than that. The author of that study, Menzie Chinn, also looked at two states where, in 2011, a Republican governor replaced a Democratic one and ushered in a radical rightward shift in state policy (Wisconsin and Kansas), and compared them to two states that did the opposite in 2011, i.e. elected a Democratic governor to replace a Republican one (California and Minnesota). It's worth noting that, of the latter two, California saw the most significant shift in policy as a Democratic legislature combined with Governor Jerry Brown to enact an even more pronounced leftward shift starting in 2011 than Minnesota's Mark Dayton was able to accomplish with a legislature that remained Republican after he took office."

"What did Chinn find? Well, in terms of job creation since 2011, it's clear: The more liberalism, the more jobs. What's that you say? That's right. 'Pro-business' policies stink at creating jobs, and progressive policies, in contrast, do the job far better." … And, "One last thing. We can compare the revenue shortfall in Kansas with California, where huge surpluses are allowing that liberal-dominated state to pay down debt."

"Evidence. Facts. Data. These are real. Conservatives can pretend that they aren't. They can wax poetically (or not) about 'liberty,' or about unleashing the capitalist genius of 'job creators' or any other nonsense they like. At some point, however, reality rears its ugly head. The reality is this: Sam Brownback is a liar. His state veered hard to the right on tax policy, and as a result its economy has underperformed the rest of country, and his budget is in shambles. President Obama's economy has performed far better than Kansas's, and his budget is in far better shape, and this after moving leftward on tax policy. But Brownback says the problems of Kansas are Obama's fault. Unbelievable!"

"I've read that emotion plays better than facts when it comes to politics. But, by gum, it's time for us to make the case, emotionally, with the facts. We have to shout from the rooftops that our policies are not only more moral, they work

better. Progressive governance makes our economy both fairer and stronger. The two go hand in hand."

It was a sad day when the Koch billionaires and other moneyed interest groups succeeded in fooling the American people into reelecting Sam Brownback and arch-conservative Koch-money addicted Governor Scott Walker of Wisconsin and other conservative Republican politicians in the November 2014 national elections, for they seriously impeded progress toward really making our nation healthier, fairer and smarter. "For the people of those states, and for all 50 of our states, the question is this: When you go into the voting booth, do facts matter? Will you compare the record of conservatism and liberalism, and vote accordingly? It's up to progressives to make the case as strongly as we can. I believe that if we do, the voters will respond." Tragically, voters elected Donald Trump in 2016, but in all future elections, we must get it right.

The bottom line is that the future well-being of the people in Kansas is being imperiled because of a radical tax experiment by ultra-conservatives. The Republican Party has all but sold the souls of its supporters to anti-environmentalists, resource exploiters, industrialist polluters, corporate shills, conservative billionaires, anti-immigrant ideologues, male supremacists, anti-gay activists, intolerant religious reactionaries, uncompromising gun fanatics, inequality apologists, and those who oppose women's rights to choose not to get pregnant or to have an abortion. *What's the Matter with Kansas* has become an infectious affliction raging through America, particularly afflicting angry white men and socially conservative partisans in the Bible Belt of the South. This perverse influence is having a negative impact on poor people in America and middle class folks, and on women, students, blacks, Latinos, lesbian women, gay men, immigrants, refugees, and the long-term unemployed. It is also deplorably serving to undermine the providential health of the environment that supports our collective well-being.

The American people must reject conservative politicians, and oppose Trump's regressive policies and the deep uncertainties associated with his divisive brand of egomaniacal and authoritarian power grab. Real conservatives must change course! The Hillary Clinton vs. Trump contest gave the American people a stark choice between democratic governance and reckless narcissistic bullying rule, and now that the USA is going further right on a wide range of issues, grave threats to smarter national planning are materializing.

A particularly complicit enabler of many of the hard-line conservative laws that are being enacted around the United States is the organization ALEC, the notoriously anti-progressive American Exchange Legislative Council. ALEC operatives design shrewd "model legislation" to serve Republican politicians throughout the 50 states so that new laws will be enacted that are deeply hostile to democratic fairness and the greater good of the people. The same is true of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce with its anti-environmental stands, and the Federalist Society in its propounding of manipulative right-wing ideologies, and all of the Koch brothers' front groups.

It is tragic to let the propaganda of billionaires triumph over common sense and the greater good. One of the influential front groups financed by Koch billionaires and their system-corrupting ilk is deceptively named Americans for Prosperity. A more appropriate name that would accurately characterize this group would be Americans for Rashly Empowered Greed, Selfishness, and Unrestricted Freedom to Exploit Natural Resources and Working Americans and Everyone in Future Generations. It is a pathetic and anti-social form of freedom to allow rich people to corrupt our politics and harmfully misguide our national decision-making.

Helping to drive right-wing offensives in the House and the Senate and the various states is a network of deep-pocketed business titans convened by the billionaire Kochs, principals in Koch Industries, the second-largest privately held corporation in the United States. Like the Kochs themselves, many of the donors in David (now deceased) and Charles' networks are not that interested in fighting against women's rights or LGBT rights, yet anti-choice organizations and anti-gay groups have seen their coffers swell with huge sums of money provided by right-wing networks.

"If you want to promote a pro-corporate agenda, you're only going to get so far," incisively noted Sue Sturgis, a Durham, North Carolina-based editorial director of the progressive website Facing South. "But when you start weaving in these social issues like abortion and other reproductive rights issues, then you're gonna appeal to a wider range of people, and a very motivated voting bloc. They will turn out. So it serves your larger cause."

Too bad that these passions are being whipped up for such hard-hearted and socially detrimental causes!

Economics 101

One of the main claims conservatives have been making in recent decades is that lower tax rates for high-income earners will stimulate the economy and create jobs. They assert that low taxes are the best way to promote and facilitate entrepreneurial activity. Historical facts completely contradict this contention. Between 1950 and today, the GDP in the U.S. grew more than 6% in 8 different years when the top tax rate was above 70%. The GDP grew at a rate in excess of 4% for 16 other years, most of which were years with much higher marginal tax rates than today. The economy has not grown 4% since the year 2000, when marginal tax rates have been below 40% each and every year.

This correlation may seem counterintuitive. But just think about it. Regressive changes in tax rates reward the relatively few high-income earners, but they undermine the financial well-being of almost everyone else. As a result, the majority of people are less able to afford to buy as many goods and services as they would if they made more money. Businesses consequently see a downturn as demand declines for their products. And low demand leads to layoffs.

Demand-side "middle out economics" would be a smarter plan than deceit-enabled unfair supply-side economics. This is a better way forward. Fairly-shared prosperity would be better for all. It was George H.W. Bush who called Ronald Reagan's supply-side arguments "voodoo economics" in 1980, and today, the evidence is in: Yes, mumbo jumbo economic ideologies are distinctly counterproductive! And with the 2020 pandemic, tax cutting and lack of preparedness are seen to b deadly. All these facts together provide a strong economic argument for a progressive restructuring of tax rates. There are also many cogent moral arguments for fairer and more just national policies.

Trump Republican officials oppose a progressive restructuring of the tax system, and even push for a really lousy plan that would eliminate the estate tax, creating a gargantuan windfall for the heirs of the two-tenths of 1% of Americans wealthy enough to owe any estate tax at all after they die. Let's just say NO!

An Aside on the Central Influence of Rising Authoritarian Sentiment

Cutting-edge studies are revealing that cunning opportunists like Donald Trump are activating "authoritarian impulses" in the American electorate. They do this by exploiting deep-seated existential angst associated with fears of social change and external threats and feelings of being left behind by the establishment. The lawyer and professor Amanda Taub has proposed a convincing theory about what exactly is contributing to this dangerous development in our politics, and she provides readers with a good big picture understanding in *The Rise of American Authoritarianism*.

An oft-stated concern about Trump is that what is most scary is not the man, but rather the extent and fervor of his support. "Perhaps strangest of all," writes Amanda Taub, "it wasn't just Trump but his supporters who seemed to have come out of nowhere, suddenly expressing, in large numbers, ideas much more extreme than anything that has risen to such popularity in recent memory. In South Carolina, a CBS News exit poll found that 75 percent of Republican voters supported banning Muslims from the U.S. Another poll found that a third of Trump voters support banning gays and lesbians from the country. Twenty percent said Lincoln shouldn't have freed the slaves."

Amanda Taub delved into research presented by a PhD student at the University of Massachusetts Amherst named Matthew MacWilliams, who sought to explain political developments in connection with some studies of authoritarian impulses -- "not actual dictators, but rather a psychological profile of individual voters that is characterized by a desire for order and a fear of outsiders." "Authoritarian followers", who score high in survey questions, tend to seek strong leaders when they feel threatened, leaders who promise to take whatever action is necessary to protect them from outsiders and prevent the changes they fear.

The effects of authoritarianism on American politics are curious and worrying. In their provocative book *Authoritarianism in American Politics*, Marc Hetherington and Jonathan Weiler explore this topic. They devised a series of experiments and careful data analysis, and came to a surprising conclusion: Much of the polarization dividing American politics was fueled not just by gerrymandering or money in politics or other oft-cited variables, but by an unnoticed but surprisingly large electoral group -- authoritarians. They concluded that the GOP, by positioning itself as the party of traditional values and law and order, had attracted what would turn out to be millions of Americans with overarching authoritarian tendencies.

Authoritarians express deeper fears than the rest of the electorate, and they want to have order imposed where they perceive dangers in changing circumstances. So they support emotion-manipulating leaders who promise to defeat those fears with domineering control and even force. This gave power to a 2016 candidate whose temperament is totally unlike anything we usually see in American politics -- and whose policies go beyond acceptable norms. "A candidate like Donald Trump, who embodies the classic authoritarian leadership style: simplistic, authority abusing and punitive."

Amanda Taub got in touch with Hetherington and MacWilliams and several other political scientists who study authoritarianism to better understand the theory that seemed to have predicted, with eerie accuracy, Trump's rise. Long before anyone thought a person like him could possibly win the Republican nomination for president, a small but respected niche of academic research has been laboring over a question that is part political science and part psychology, one that had captivated political scientists since the rise of the Nazis.

How do people come to adopt, in such large numbers and so rapidly, extreme political views that coincide with stoked fears of minorities and desires for a strongman leader? This situation is reminiscent of the gripping drama depicted in the film *The Wave* by director Dennis Gansel. The film is based on a real-life high school classroom experiment in which students went from being normal undisciplined and somewhat cynical teenagers to being a cohesive group that accepted authoritarian order and discipline and conformity, and did so within the span of a single week's time. The film is a provocative revelation

of the fact that human behaviors can be quickly and easily manipulated. We sure would be better off to structure our societies so that our collective behaviors are manipulated in positive ways, with liberty and justice for all, rather than allowing shadow elements to drive us ruthlessly toward ruin and divisive intolerance and mean-spirited extremes of unfairness and greed.

The political phenomenon identified as right-wing populism lines up, with astonishing precision, with research on how authoritarianism is both caused and expressed. According to a theory articulated by Karen Stenner, there is a certain subset of people that hold latent authoritarian tendencies, and these tendencies can be triggered or "activated" by the perception of physical threats or by destabilizing social change. This leads those individuals to desire policies and leaders that are authoritarian.

More than that, authoritarian impulses reveal the connections between several seemingly disparate stories about American politics. And it suggests that a combination of demographic, economic and political forces, by awakening this authoritarian class of voters that has coalesced around Trump, have created what is essentially a new political party within the GOP -- a phenomenon that broke into public view with the 2016 election, but will persist long after it has ended.

This theory holds that people support extreme policies and strongman leaders as a reaction to experiencing certain kinds of threats. This social threat theory helps explain why authoritarians seem so prone to reject not just one specific kind of outsider or social change, such as Muslims or same-sex couples or Latino migrants, but rather to reject all of them. Today, authoritarians skew heavily Republican.

Authoritarians have affiliated with the Republican Party since the 1960s when the Party shifted electoral strategies to try to win disaffected white Southern Democrats by fomenting fears of black people, and of changing social norms associated with desegregation and the civil rights movement. The GOP also embraced a "law and order" platform with a heavily racial appeal to white voters who were concerned about race riots.

Research on authoritarianism suggests it's not just physical threats driving all this. Other types of threats -- larger, slower, less obvious, but potentially even more powerful -- push authoritarians to these extremes. These threats involve evolving social norms, such as the erosion of traditional gender roles or evolving standards in how to discuss sexual orientation. It also involves political and economic changes that disrupt social hierarchies, and rising diversity and demographic changes from population growth and immigration.

These social changes are accelerating, and working-class white people seem to feel especially victimized by them. It is conventional wisdom to ascribe the rise of the Tea Party and now Trump Republicans to the notion that working-class white Americans are angry, but there is much more to this sentiment. These people are faced with both economic and demographic pressures that research suggests are highly likely to trigger authoritarian impulses, and this helps explain their gravitation toward extreme political responses.

Working-class communities came under tremendous economic strain after the 2008 recession, and now it is suddenly much worse in 2020. And white people are facing the loss of the privileged position that they previously were able to take for granted. Whites are now projected to become a minority group within 30 years, owing to migration and higher birth rates among Latinos and blacks than whites. Barack Obama is a black man, and non-white faces are growing more common in popular culture. This has had the effect of causing non-white groups to raise increasingly strident political demands, and often those demands coincide with issues such as hard-line policing and incarceration policies that also speak to concerns of authoritarian followers.

Trump's specific policies are not the thing that most set him apart from the rest of Republicans. Rather, it's his inflammatory rhetoric and style, and the way he reduces everything to black-and-white extremes of strong versus weak, greatest versus worst -- and his simple, direct promises that he can solve problems that other politicians are too weak to manage. “I alone can fix it”, he absurdly declared when he was a candidate. His policies since he took office are making a disaster of public health, international trade, global relationships and the environment.

This trend toward authoritarian rule had been accelerated in recent years by demographic and economic changes such as immigration, which "activated" authoritarian tendencies and led many Americans to seek out a strongman leader who would appeal to white people and religious fundamentalists who intolerantly want to preserve a status quo they feel is under threat.

Curiously, white supremacism is taking on a desperate quality all these years after segregation was outlawed and the Ku Klux Klan was powerful. Non-Hispanic white people represented almost 90% of the American populace in 1950, and today it is less than 64%, and declining. White supremacists -- get over it! Start standing up for the rights of minorities NOW! Set a fair-minded precedent for your own future well-being.

The Republican establishment has demonstrated an inability to regain control over the renegade authoritarians, and the

authoritarians are actively opposed to the establishment's centrist goals, and they are not particularly interested in its economic platform. For decades, the Republican Party has been attracting authoritarians by implicitly promising to stand firm against the tide of social change, and to be the party of force and power rather than the party of negotiation and compromise. But now it may be discovering that its strategy has worked too well -- and this has torn the party apart, harming the national psyche and future prospects. With Trump triumphant, and his petro state-like fossil fuel Cabinet in place -- and pandemic failures glaring -- the risks of repressive rule and harsh authoritarian dictates and proliferating malfeasance are dangerously spiking.

Making a Fair-Minded Pledge

"I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

--- Official U.S. Pledge of Allegiance from 1942 to 1954

Note that the words "under God" were added to the Pledge of Allegiance in 1954, as a kind of propaganda initiative in reaction to stoked fears of godless communism during the Joseph McCarthy era, early in the Cold War. Republicans are now, seemingly cynically, using the name of God to try to further divide the country to advance their demands to impose a narrow "right-wing engineering" agenda. Since all religions have a spectrum of adherents that runs from the liberal left to the reactionary right, it is time that moderates and progressives in every faith reject conservative elements that have dominated their religious establishments for far too long.

Republican Dysfunction

This "hell-no caucus" of the Republican Party commandeered control of their increasingly dysfunctional political party in October 2015. These absolutists and right-wing extremists live in a gerrymandered echo chamber of uncompromising ideology. They demand a ridiculous degree of "purity" that is so sullied as to make rational understanding practically incomprehensible. They fervently believe that there is a God that cares more about a woman's egg from the moment it is fertilized than real living children or their mothers, so they are generally opposed to Planned Parenthood, often even preferring to religiously impose mandatory motherhood on raped women and victims of incest who become pregnant. This is an absurd stance for a male domineering faction of the House of Representatives that calls itself the Freedom Caucus!

The House Freedom Caucus is a group of 34 Republicans loosely associated with the Tea Party. It exercised much influence in throwing John Boehner out of power as Speaker of the House in 2015, and initially demanded that any new leader of the House make a commitment to force the U.S. government into default on the national debt unless cuts are made to programs like Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid. It also demanded that a new Speaker refuse to compromise on a budget for the U.S. if it included any funding for Obamacare, the Iran nuclear arms deal, Planned Parenthood, or immigration "amnesty".

This contempt for compromise has undermined the Republicans' drive to pretend that they can actually govern fairly. The Republican Party often looks like the "party of stupid", and this was confirmed after the Freedom Caucus drove Boehner from his position as House Speaker, and then torpedoed his replacement-in-waiting, the "Young Gun" Kevin McCarthy, after he candidly admitted that the longest running congressional investigation in history (into the Benghazi diplomatic compound tragedy) was really an effort that had a primary purpose of undermining the presidential candidacy of Hillary Clinton.

It is easy to imagine the indignation of angry conservatives at the characterization of their political party as the "party of stupid", because of the overly broad-brush nature and stinging kernel of truth contained in this generalization. But there is a good reason for this observation, since a more intelligent approach is to be open-minded rather than closed-minded, and to be aware of complexities, nuances and uncertainties rather than to be chock full of certitude and blind faith and indoctrinated ideological convictions. When a person is an unthinking Rush Limbaugh "dittohead", or a bigoted racist, discriminatory against others, or is reactive and overly susceptible to fear or excessive gullibility, they are revealed to be more stupid than smart. As Bertrand Russell wrote: "The trouble with the world is that the stupid are cocksure and the intelligent are full of doubt."

Political science columnist Allen Clifton wrote a sensational article in April 2015 titled "*Republican Party Has Literally Become the Party of Stupid*". A reader might expect that an article with this title would contain gratuitous partisanship, but the validity of thought-provoking point after revealing point after convincing point concerning the incoherent ideologies in the right wing of the Republican Party would make any but the most stubborn or obtusely unaware or dishonest observer shake their head with disgusted agreement. Don't take my word for it -- read Allen Clifton's article!

Listen in. After mentioning climate change denial, oil company spin, Creationism in religious circles, and the fervent conviction that widespread gun ownership makes people safer, Clifton then transitions into this: "Then we can't forget the religious folks who somehow believe that their freedoms are being trampled on because they're being prevented from denying millions of Americans their Constitutional rights. No matter how hard I try, I still can't wrap my mind around that

ridiculous 'logic.' But then there's always the economic theory pushed by the GOP that if we just make rich people richer, that somehow the rest of us will benefit. Meanwhile, not only are Republicans admitting that income inequality is a problem -- they're pushing for more of the same policies that made it a problem in the first place."

"Then there are always my favorites: The people who rely on government programs, voting for people trying to cut or eliminate the programs they rely on to survive. Millions of people on Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, food stamps and other government programs are voting for politicians who essentially refer to them as lazy moochers who just want the government to take care of them. When Mitt Romney talked about the 47 percent, those are the people to which he was referring - and millions of them voted for him anyway."

Allen Clifton's perspectives are legitimate, and it sure does appear that many of the stances adopted by Republican politicians are coldly cynical calculations that are contradictory, irrational, hypocritical, prejudiced, dysfunctional and mean-spirited. It is exceedingly odd that conservatives often claim they are Christians and believe in Jesus, yet they are adamantly opposed to helping poor people by supporting social program spending if it means that the rich would be required to pay higher taxes on the top levels of their incomes. At the same time, they somehow rationalize in their minds being zealously opposed to allowing poor women to choose to limit the size of their families, even though this means we fail to save the government large sums of money on the many costs related to poor families having many children.

Be Careful What You Wish For

Many extremely conservative Tea Party politicians have been elected in contorted congressional districts. The strategy of gerrymandering voters into bizarrely drawn districts is ethically corrupt, though both political parties have practiced it for more than 200 years since Massachusetts Governor Elbridge Gerry concocted the scheme in 1812. Today, the anti-democratic aggregation of extreme conservatives into districts where they cannot be defeated is having the unintended and undesirable effect of finally causing the GOP to careen off the rails. This was proven when the uncompromising rectitude of the Freedom Caucus led to Congress driving John Boehner from his position as Speaker of the House, and his heir apparent Kevin McCarthy bowed out of his ambition to replace him after his gaffe of honesty about the Benghazi tragedy.

Right wing politicians and Rush Limbaugh dittoheads were angry and frustrated at President Obama's power and success, but their intransigent emotions threw Republican politics into chaos at the same time that a full 50% of likely Republican voters in December 2015 supported candidates for president who were politically inexperienced -- i.e., Carly Fiorina., Ben Carson and Donald Trump. The GOP was thus devolving into chaos at the very moment that crucial issues and deadlines loomed, including the need to increase the national debt limit and the need to take sensible actions on immigration, women's rights and campaign finance reform. The Tea Party-driven splinter group within the House of Representatives was not only rancorously anti-Obama, but anti-government, anti-evolution, anti-contraception, anti-abortion, anti-Planned Parenthood, anti-feminist, anti-gun regulation, anti-environmental protection, and rabidly anti-Iran, and most of them are climate change deniers who oppose doing anything reasonable about one of the most far-reaching threats ever posed to civilization.

To think of shutting down the federal government over a relatively tiny amount of funding for an organization that provides vital healthcare for poor women seems crazy. This stubborn stance alone should be political suicide, given that 50% of American voters are women and this position is so directly contrary to the rights of females and their healthcare, dignity and prerogatives to be able to exert choice in their own destinies.

At the conclusion of his State of the Union address in January 2016, President Obama observed: "Democracy does require basic bonds of trust between its citizens. It doesn't work if we think the people who disagree with us are all motivated by malice, or that our political opponents are unpatriotic." President Obama's idealistic words about presumptions of malice notwithstanding, there are people that an independent assessment of consequential ethics would judge to be malicious, and here is one example -- and it is a fine kettle of fish.

News broke in January 2016 that a Houston grand jury, which had been investigating accusations of criminal misconduct against Planned Parenthood, instead brought felony charges against the leader of an anti-abortion group who had made covert videos of the organization's employees. The videos had been maliciously edited to generate gruesome suspicions and passionate opposition, which was exploited by all the Republican presidential candidates. In particular, Carly Fiorina and Ted Cruz parroted outrageous mischaracterizations of the purposes and activities of Planned Parenthood clinics. The crude and misleading videos generated a toxic cloud that likely contributed to an atmosphere in which a domestic terrorist chose to shoot people at a clinic in Colorado Springs, killing three and wounding nine. The shooter expressed anti-abortion and anti-government views, and was apparently riled up by believing that Planned Parenthood was selling "baby parts".

The upshot of this news was that anti-family-planning zealots are so religiously and self-righteously opposed to the idea of a private organization providing healthcare services to disadvantaged women that they broke laws and maliciously made and deceptively edited videos to stoke partisan emotions and distort the greater good represented by Planned Parenthood

clinics. This development is a pathetic example of unethical exploitation of people's emotions to hijack our societies and strengthen support for the agendas of right wing billionaires. Even after this pathological ruse was glaringly exposed, Republican politicians continued to exploit the emotions generated by the "baby parts" meme for their own nefariously self-serving purposes.

The strong character of Ma Joad in John Steinbeck's epic novel *The Grapes of Wrath* provides an inspiring counterpoint. Ma Joad showed feminine strength by offering a sense of domestic harmony and good connection and patient strength and an empathetic sense of compassion. She was rational and powerful because she was flexible and adaptive in the face of changing circumstances. In bizarre contrast, the Republican presidential candidate Carly Fiorina attempted to sound strong in the second Republican presidential debate by declaring she would not talk to Russian President Vladimir Putin if she was elected. Is this the best wisdom that this female Republican politician could offer? Trump, in contrast, has had a suspicious bromance-like attitude toward Putin.

Republican President Dwight D. Eisenhower's hometown was Abilene, Kansas, and he managed to deal with a Congress dominated by Democrats almost sixty years ago without having political gridlock, and government during his tenure as president was not paralyzed by intense ideological battles. The reason for this measured success was that 'Ike' pursued moderate policies and cooperation as a means to govern well.

In Kansas today, laughter could almost be heard echoing amongst the tall peaks of the Rocky Mountains just to the west, and may even have rumbled across Mount Sunflower, the highest point in Kansas. Lying near the Colorado border, Mount Sunflower has a barely discernible summit with a small shrine on it and a guest book that has a postscript at the bottom of the first page. It notes: "Technically, to be a true mountain there must be a 2,000 foot elevation difference in a 10-20 mile radius, so Mount Sunflower is not a true mountain."

Not a true mountain! In delightful similarity, the trickle-down theory is not a true theory. No, not true at all. It is, in reality, a barely concealed bit of repetitiously repeated propaganda that is greed driven and deceitful. It is a bill-of-goods that has been peddled to the American people ever since it was concocted by some shrewd characters and promoted by Ronald Reagan to gain support and get money from wealthy donors.

The state motto of Kansas is a Latin phrase that means *"To the Stars through Difficulty"*. Sam Brownback unwittingly set Kansas on a backward journey toward ever-more daunting difficulties, and it would be wise for voters in Kansas to reject all the dishonest Republican politicians in every future election on account of their serious betrayals of the public trust. The sunflower is the state flower of Kansas, which is why Kansas is known as the Sunflower State, and it is of passing interest to know that sunflowers need full sun to grow well, not shade or darkness. For this reason, I surmise, it is odd that the "mushroom theory of management" works so well in these environs ("keep them in the dark, and feed them a lot of bullshit"). Curiously, sunflowers are sometimes used to extract toxic ingredients such as lead and arsenic from soil. There is a harmonious ring to the idea of cultivating a beautiful plant that provides economic benefits while at the same time helping protect from harmful substances.

O say, Kansans, can you see, How auspicious it would be
To reject ideological toxicity
And reinstitute an overarching concern for the general welfare and the common good
For conquer we must, and this cause is just
And the greater good must prevail, and democracy must reign
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.

Sam Brownback should have been honest with the people and admitted that what's really the matter with Kansas is that "conservative" economic ideology is a misguided and misguiding idea, not a truly fair public policy. Honest economists like Robert Reich, Joseph Stiglitz and Paul Krugman have made it abundantly clear over the years that the trickle-down theory is a scoundrels' ruse perpetrated by the wealthy, and that it is not even marginally fair to the vast majority of the people.

Sam Brownback made himself appear ridiculously gullible and susceptible to a foolish absolutism of conviction by setting up his rash economic experiment that was highly likely to definitively discredit beliefs in trickle-down ideology and expose it as a Big Lie. Any honorable intervening God would have emulated Nemesis, the Greek Goddess of Divine Vengeance and Poetic Justice, and struck Brownback down with a bolt of lightning for his hubris and deceptive abuse of governmental power to rig the system ever more extremely in favor of the wealthy. "Thank God" that his stint as governor finally ended in widespread disapproval and disgrace in 2018.

Principles and Consequential Ethics

"Republicans are principled", declared one conservative politician several years ago. More like extremely opportunistic to me, but if that statement is true, let's look again at the full scope of the evidence to determine what the real Republican

principles actually are, in contrast to what conservatives may say they are. At the top of the list is a commitment to cutting taxes on rich people and big businesses. They do crow about freedom, but their main interest is to champion the freedom of the wealthy to rig the economy ever more favorably for their own benefit, generally at the expense of the majority of *We the People.* They also want to increase spending on the military and cut spending on programs that are in the best interests of the vast majority of Americans. They want to get rid of healthcare under the Affordable Care Act, to the detriment of millions of Americans, and to privatize education and prisons. Some of them want to deport millions of immigrants living in the U.S. illegally. They want fewer restrictions on gun ownership, which would make most people statistically more at risk of being killed by people with guns, and thereby increase national insecurity. They want to gain more power by restricting voter rights and gerrymandering congressional districts and preventing campaign finance reform -- and stacking federal courts and the Supreme Court with far-right partisan conservatives.

Frank Zappa once expressed the angry conviction that, "Republicans stand for raw, unbridled evil and greed and ignorance smothered in balloons and ribbons." If one looks beyond the balloons and ribbons and Reaganesque imagery of a shining city on the hill, and judges the principles revealed by Republican actions rather than by their words, their principles are not high-minded, and are seriously tarnished by self-serving expediencies and obsequious pandering to wealthy people and intolerant religious folks and angry white males.

What can make greed especially nefarious is when it is accompanied by an unempathetic, obtusely mean-spirited "I've got mine, tough luck that you don't have yours" attitude and a smugly self-righteous and stubborn "purity". This is why it is so grievous for Republican politicians to use simplistic slogans and political chicanery and underhanded deviousness to fool voters into giving them the power to champion an agenda favoring rich people in return for the politicians gaining generous financial backing for their careers. Money and power are the bottom line of politics for these folks, and certainly not honorable public service or greater good goals.

Republicans generally do not support environmental protections, but when they do address environmental issues, their focus is often on denying climate change, expanding oil and gas drilling, and privatizing America's public lands. Republicans generally want to limit environmental protections and sell off public lands, or to transfer them to state control, which might be a boon to Big Oil companies and private developers, but would result in the loss of cherished open spaces and fewer fishing, hiking, camping and other outdoor recreation opportunities.

Catering to the desires of rich people can be very lucrative for politicians. When this activity results in scurrilously detrimental outcomes for the people, such self-serving pandering is morally reprehensible. Many Republican politicians are arrogantly uncompromising when it comes to their insistence on imposing anti-family planning ideologies on millions of women. Reince Priebus, at the time the Chairman of the Republican National Committee, enunciated his "Principles for American Renewal" in October 2014, including this: "As Republicans we're pro-family; and we're also pro-life. So when a woman faces an unplanned pregnancy, society should offer our support and compassion. She should know that adoption is possible. Our laws should be improved to make adoption an easier path for families who want to open their homes to children."

This principle means they officially want to ban all abortions and force every female who becomes pregnant to carry an unwanted embryo until it becomes a fetus and eventually becomes viable, and then after a total of nine months, they will deign to allow a pregnant woman to choose to give up a baby for adoption. As a blanket policy, this principle is extremely unempathetic with regard to all the circumstances that may be involved in any woman's life, or how she became pregnant, so it is simply insufficient as a basis of national policy.

At the other end of life, anti-choice zealots oppose the right of terminally ill adults to choose a dignified, pain-free, humane death with help from their doctors. They have spread "death panel" lies about a policy to extend Medicare coverage to include voluntary end-of-life consultations between patients and their doctors. "It's a tactic we see repeatedly," indicates the organization Compassion and Choices, "the use of deliberate lies to poison debate, create political controversy and restrict the rights of others to make their own decisions about care and comfort at life's end."

Females were likely to have been the first ones to have cottoned on, far back in human prehistory, to the fact that there was a correlation between having sex with one particular male around the time of one of their full moon menstrual bleeding periods and the act of giving birth to a baby nine months later. After they first made this connection, they understandably and justifiably adopted a strategy of being much more choosy about what particular male they would be willing to have sex with. They wanted a good physical specimen and a responsible male that would not abandon his mate in the lifelong obligations of providing for their needy and demanding offspring. Females today deserve this unalienable biological freedom to make such an "Original Choice".

A woman should have the right to freely choose whether or not to have a baby, for this is one of the most consequential events of her life, and no government should have the right to dictate her decision to her. The anti-abortion debate really is a political stance that oppresses women, and a moral judgment that a sperm and an egg once united have superior rights to

those of a woman who might choose not to have an unwanted child after she finds out she has gotten pregnant. Sister Joan Chittister, a Benedictine nun, provides perspective: "I do not believe that just because you're opposed to abortion that that makes you pro-life. In fact, I think in many cases, your morality is deeply lacking. If all you want is a child born but not a child fed, not a child educated, not a child housed … (as revealed because) you don't want any tax money to go there. That's not pro-life. That's pro-birth. We need a much broader conversation on what the morality of pro-life is."

The Supreme Court guaranteed a woman's right to choose in the 1973 Roe vs. Wade ruling. This decision was a fair-minded compromise, which stated a woman has a legal right to get a safe abortion during the first trimester of a pregnancy. With the anniversary of this decision in January 2020, it was a good time to consider this issue in a comprehensive big picture context as the antagonistic Trump presidency continued to unfold. Since 1973, Republicans have passed more than 1,000 laws to restrict a woman's right to choose, and the zeal to undermine this right has been ratcheting up in the past 5 years, and is radically ramping up in 2020. The underlying reason for this fact is revealing, and is strongly correlated to another Supreme Court ruling in the *Citizens United* case, which Bernie Sanders assails because it allows unlimited elections spending by corporations and special interest groups like anti-abortion groups, calling it "one of the most disastrous Supreme Court decisions in my lifetime. This decision hinges on the absurd notion that money is speech, that corporations are people, and that giving huge piles of undisclosed cash in support of politicians in exchange for influence does not constitute corruption."

The Roe vs. Wade decision was a big step toward protecting women's health and affirming their control of their own bodies. Unfortunately, extreme right-wing politicians have made it more and more difficult for women to actually access abortion care in many states, due in many cases to the federal Hyde Amendment and other anti-abortion laws. Efforts to make it harder for women to access reproductive health care by shutting down clinics are reprehensible. Making women travel long distances, or wait weeks for an appointment, or face harassment at clinic doors is a national disgrace. We should affirm not only the right to have an abortion, but we should offer pregnant women the right to safely access a doctor or clinic where that procedure can be performed. On a larger stage, we should repeal the Helms Amendment, which was enacted to restrict U.S. foreign aid from going toward abortions in other countries. This law is "a deadly policy that effectively denies abortion care to women and girls around the world who experience rape, incest or life-threatening pregnancies."

An important reason to have rejected Republican politicians in the 2016 elections should have been to prevent a Republican president from appointing more ideologically driven corporate-friendly partisans to the Supreme Court, because they would not only continue to support rights of corporations to spend freely to corrupt our political system, but they also could overturn Roe vs. Wade and make abortions illegal again, forcing many women to have dangerous and too often fatal backroom abortions. If abortions had remained illegal and Republicans had somehow succeeded in forcing every one of the estimated 60 million pregnant women who have had legal abortions since 1973 to deliver unwanted babies, the US population would be somewhere in the vicinity of 400 million today, instead of 330 million, and a higher percentage of the population would be black and Hispanic. Since 1980, there have been more than 1.4 billion abortions worldwide. If conservatives had had their way and they could have forced every one of those pregnant women to have kept their embryos until giving birth, the world population would currently exceed 9 billion today, with a likely catastrophically more rapid onset of severe ecological and biotic consequences.

Conclusion

Progressive politicians understand that if conservatives continue to get away with exerting domineering control in our societies, they will be unable to help citizens who, as Justin Trudeau declared on the night he was elected, are tired of the twin ideas that they "should be satisfied with less" and that "better just isn't possible."

We need to keep pushing forward on things like making college more affordable, passing comprehensive immigration reform, ending the excessive influence of big money in politics, reinforcing women's reproductive prerogatives, and closing growing gaps in inequalities of income and wealth. To do that, we need to elect progressive leaders who will make strong commitments to fighting for these things and building on them in the years to come. Hillary Clinton would have been an infinitely better bet than Trump to actualize these hopes.

President Obama explained it clearly in early 2016: "Time and again the 2016 Republican presidential candidates talk about more tax cuts for the folks at the very top, even though we can clearly see that there is no evidence to show that that would grow the economy. They want to roll back Wall Street reform and go back to letting the big banks run wild. And let's not forget -- of course, they want to repeal the Affordable Care Act!"

I urge my fellow Americans to stand up against the corrupting influences of conservative politicians and to set a new course towards a fairer, healthier, saner and more sustainable future! Right Mindfulness, Right Effort and Right Action required!

Yours truly,
Dr. Tiffany B. Twain