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## *Progressive Agenda for a More Sane Humanity*

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December 2010 (with a few additions since then)

The human race can achieve a more propitious destiny by embracing fair-minded ideas and bold plans that courageously and honestly address the pressing problems facing humanity here in the 21st century.

This Progressive Agenda consists of an elaborate list of ideas that, if implemented, would make our communities healthier, our economy more stable and sound, our societies saner, and our supporting environment more likely to be sustainable. These ideas include plans that are more comprehensive than the bigger picture and higher priority mega-ideas that are proposed in *One Dozen Big Initiatives to Positively Make America Great Again*.

Each of the initiatives proposed herein is categorized into one of eight principal domains: *Economic Priorities, Environmental Priorities, Foreign Policy Priorities, Government Priorities, Social Justice Priorities, Education Priorities, Legal System Priorities, and Health Priorities*.

"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."

--- Jacques-Yves Cousteau

NOTE: This document was last updated a year or two ago. Constructive editorial suggestions are welcomed and encouraged. Contact me at [SaveTruffulaTrees@hotmail.com](mailto:SaveTruffulaTrees@hotmail.com). Thanks!

### RESOLUTION:

Whereas the need is great for humanity to create enduring and sustainable societies;

And whereas, to do this, we must adopt long-term plans that are visionary and fair-minded;

And whereas such long-term vision would guide us toward better solutions to the daunting challenges we collectively face than the alternative of allowing regressive ideas and the status quo to continue to prevail;

And whereas consensus must be reached to create common grounds for good understanding, optimum planning and consistent action, we must work together to find better ways of sensibly establishing priorities that help assure we have a sound international economy characterized by moderate risk, truer justice and peaceful coexistence;

Therefore, let it be resolved that we radically redesign and restructure our economic and political systems so that they are fairer, more humane, more far-sighted, and more secure for all.

Be it also resolved that we find a means to motivate ourselves, individually and collectively, to live our lives in ways that are more authentic, fulfilling, responsible and sustainable, and that we never forget that our ultimate social responsibility is to leave a fair legacy to our children, and to everyone in future generations.

Let us seek new and innovative ways to redefine progress to give greater respect to the common good, and to bring forth a general prosperity that is characterized by more egalitarian social policies that help ensure the health and well-being of a growing middle class.

Let us seek an understanding of justice-for-all that wholeheartedly incorporates the wisdom and fairness of Golden Rule principles.

Let us strive to coexist with other people in our communities and on our planet in more honest, empathetic, collaborative and peaceable ways.

Let us give greater respect to the rights and freedoms and mutual security needs of peoples in other nations by striving to prevent war, fairly resolve conflicts, adhere to international laws, build peace, and understand the pragmatic reasons that we should honor multilateral action and the sovereignty and dignity of other countries.

Let us carefully consider the perspectives of those who say that U.S. doctrines of preemptive warfare and imperialistic empire-building are doomed to a kind of failure that will leave us all far less safe and make the world significantly more unstable and dangerous.

And let us cultivate a kind of longer-term vision that ensures that our legacy to our descendants will be a fortuitous one that helps protect the diversity of life on Earth and a stable climate and healthy enveloping ecosystems.

The following ideas represent policy alternatives to the status quo. They are much more just and sustainable than today's short-term-oriented, mismanaged, profit-prepossessed and highly partisan doctrines. These ideas, if implemented, would ensure a more salubrious collective fate than current policies portend. They would help mitigate interpersonal and international tensions and conflicts, and thus transform our societies into saner and healthier ones.

On the off-chance that this Progressive Agenda becomes a compelling force in the world of ideas, or is used as a resource by voters, organizations, politicians or students -- or that it becomes the founding principles of a new Progressive Political Party -- these understandings should serve as a rough guideline for the intelligent reform of the policies of the United States. We are reaching a Tipping Point in world affairs, and these ideas just might stick!

"We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them."

--- Albert Einstein

"... I offer nothing more than simple facts, plain arguments, and common sense ... and have no other preliminaries to settle with readers than that they will divest themselves of prejudice and prepossession, and suffer their reason and feelings to determine for themselves ... and generously enlarge their views beyond the present day."

--- Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*, 1776 (paraphrased)

"The only real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes."

--- Marcel Proust

::: Economic Priorities :::

Undertake a revolutionary transformation of our economy, with the objective of making our uses of resources and our ways of life more sustainable -- fiscally, socially, environmentally.

Manage the economy better by making production processes more energy efficient and less wasteful of natural resources.

Encourage innovation, 'green building', renewable energy sources and new industries that will contribute to a necessary greening of the international economy.

Ensure that all costs of production are included in the price of every product, including fair wages, reasonable corporate taxes, pollution prevention, and toxic waste mitigation and clean-up. Do not continue to allow corporations to externalize costs onto society.

Redefine progress by utilizing a *Genuine Progress Indicator* to more accurately gauge the health of our economy. Stop using misleading *Gross Domestic Product (GDP)* measures that fail to assess damaging impacts and the true quality of economic growth. This will allow us to more intelligently shape and redesign our economy. (See the website [RedefiningProgress.org](http://RedefiningProgress.org)).

Create sensible, balanced and farsighted new rules and enforcement to prevent another economic meltdown by controlling speculative debt leveraging and subjecting banks and both existing and new categories of securities to better transparency and accountability.

Re-institute the *Glass-Steagall Act* to prevent conflicts of interest between depository banks and investment banks.

Enact reforms of financial markets to rein in systemic risks posed by gambits of hedge fund managers and private equity funds, in accordance with the suggestions in Chapter Four of Robert Kuttner's book *The Squandering of America: How the Failure of Our Politics Undermines Our Prosperity*.

Supervise financial institutions more effectively, and make policy decisions with greater regard for systemic risks.

Focus any future government bailouts on sensible basic plans and make sure that people who cause problems, or those who profit most from them, including corporate executives and investors, are the ones who actually shoulder most of the cost of paying for them.

Include Main Street, not just Wall Street firms, in future financial bailouts. Do this by investing in a productive economy that puts Americans to work at decent wages in productive jobs that add value to families and communities.

Prevent predatory banking schemes and the fleecing of people by unscrupulous mortgage brokers and other lenders.

Establish a way to mediate the renegotiation of mortgages to reduce home foreclosures.

Create incentives for rent-to-own plans that are designed to keep people in homes subject to being foreclosed.

Levy a financial transactions tax on all stock, bond, commodity, and insurance transactions to create a fund for future bailouts like the ones financed by borrowed money to stimulate the economy during the 2008-2010 recession.

Make it a clearer purpose of the Federal Reserve to preserve financial stability and to reasonably control the growth of asset bubbles to prevent them from becoming overblown and thus causing painful economic busts.

Regulate the packaging and securitization of mortgage loans so they can be rationally evaluated, rated and priced.

Impose progressive surtaxes on all incomes over \$1 million per year for couples and over \$500,000 for single taxpayers and for all corporations earning more than \$25 million in net profits until the national debt is stabilized. Invest half of the revenue from these taxes in clean energy, physical infrastructure, public education, and improved healthcare.

Require all city, county, state and federal governments to assess fees to help cover unfunded liabilities they have for long-term pension and healthcare costs of government retirees, and require sensible and fiscally responsible provisions to cover future liabilities.

Make healthcare fairer for all by divorcing coverage from employment and finding a way to achieve universal coverage for all citizens.

Regulate excess profiteering by health insurance companies and find a fair-minded way to cover people who have 'preexisting conditions'.

Reduce government bureaucracy and its undisciplined, mismanaged and profligate spending.

Reevaluate and manage military spending better, reducing it by 25% in the next 5 years.

Close 25% of the military bases we maintain in 130 countries abroad.

Invest more wisely in our nation's crumbling physical infrastructure (see details in the American Society of Engineers Report Card that rates our overall 2013 performance a lowly "D+").

Reform the laws and regulations governing speculative oil futures markets, and close the "Enron Loophole", which is costing people billions of dollars worldwide in high oil prices.

Implement a \$3 dollar per barrel "green tax" on every barrel of oil pumped domestically or imported. Use the money raised to finance highway and bridge construction and repair projects and to help solve problems related to the nation's deteriorating infrastructure and needs for expanded mass transit services.

Provide more affordable loans to small businesses through the Small Business Administration, in recognition of the fact that small businesses are vital to economic and job growth in America. Subsidize this initiative with taxes on the most profitable 500 corporations in the United States.

Develop financial 'literacy training,' and provide it to all American citizens so that they will have a better understanding of how to manage credit and debt, and how to do better at saving money, and how to avoid predatory lenders and other financial pitfalls.

Promote the cause of microcredit and the *Village Banking Campaign* to encourage microloans and microinsurance and to help reduce poverty by providing aid to small enterprises that help poor women and children worldwide.

Reduce subsidies and loopholes that primarily benefit large corporations.

Implement policies that emphasize fair trade, not just free trade, and make strong provisions in international trade agreements for fair treatment of workers and for environment protections.

Increase the Standard Deduction on everyone's tax return by \$2,500 of income free from tax for every taxpayer. Ensure that this highly egalitarian change is revenue neutral by adjusting the progressive tax scale to make up for lost revenue.

Increase taxes on Big Business, so that this segment of the economy pays a share of national taxes equal to what it did 25 years ago (yes, it was then much higher than today). This will ensure that product prices include a fair share of corporate taxes.

Reinstate the Estate Tax to its pre-2001 status, making sure that once every generation the super-wealthy are required to square up with society for the privilege of having been able to live in a land that allows them to maintain their good fortune and great privileges. Set the tax-exempt exclusion at \$2.5 million, and tax amounts

in excess of this on a sliding scale up to a maximum marginal estate tax rate of 60% on rich kid's inheritances over \$100 million.

Make the tax treatment of charitable contributions more favorable for all taxpayers by making such contributions deductible directly from taxable income, not just as components of itemized deductions.

Simplify tax laws and reduce the loopholes in them that allow wealthy people to reduce their actual reported Taxable Income.

Eliminate tax loopholes for billionaire hedge fund managers and private equity firm managers. These loopholes allow them to pay taxes at low capital gains rates on their income rather than higher income tax rates that other workers pay on their earnings.

Change taxes on capital gains to make them progressively graduated, replacing the current 15% tax on all capital gains with a 10% tax on gains up to \$10,000, 15% on gains between \$10,000 and \$100,000, 25% on gains between \$100,000 and \$1 million, and 40% on gains over \$1 million.

Beef up IRS tax law enforcement, and target rich cheaters instead of the middle class and the poor.

Eliminate the tax evasion that is inherent in offshore incorporation, which currently allows American companies to shelter assets overseas and drains an estimated \$70 billion annually from the federal Treasury.

Treat the Social Security system as an insurance system, not a guaranteed retirement system, since it now operates as a Ponzi-type scheme that is a transfer of payments system, not a fully funded retirement system. Means testing should be applied so that those who earn more than \$200,000 per year in income and dividends and capital gains do not receive any Social Security payments. This would help make the system more sound and sustainable.

Give careful consideration to Thom Hartmann's well-articulated Eleven Ways to Rebuild Our Country.

"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."

--- Jean Jacques Cousteau

::: Environmental Priorities :::

Honor Precautionary Principles as enunciated in the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development in order to protect Earth's ecosystems and biodiversity.

Invest in revitalizing cities to make them safer and more livable, and to limit suburban sprawl, and to promote more compact development.

Provide significant sales tax rebates for vehicles that get more than 40 miles per gallon, and institute higher sales taxes on vehicles that get less than 20 miles per gallon.

Invest in public transportation, and make a commitment to help finance the acquisition of equipment as well as related operating and construction costs. Create strong motivations for commuters to use public transportation by making it safer, less expensive, and more convenient.

Implement legislation to immediately increase federal gasoline taxes by 25 cents per gallon, and add another 25 cents every year for each of the next 10 years. Use the proceeds of these taxes to pay for public transportation and needed infrastructure improvements to roads and bridges, and develop a plan to mitigate the regressive impacts these taxes would have on workers that are least able to afford the higher costs.

Implement "peak pricing" congestion fees in dense urban areas to reduce traffic and smog, and to increase public transportation ridership.

Assess property taxes at a lower rate for smaller homes, and at higher rates for houses larger than 2,500 square feet. Use a progressive scale that increases as the size of homes increases. Set this plan up so that it

results in a moderate net increase in property taxes, and use the funds generated to finance affordable housing and to provide a federal Renter's Tax Credit so that those who rent are not discriminated against in favor of homeowners.

Foster the development of "in fill" housing in appropriate urban areas.

Focus efforts on achieving sustainable resource consumption and preventing "tragedy of the commons" adversities in which shared resources are damaged or polluted or exhausted by vested interests that act in rational but narrowly self-serving ways.

Undertake a National Intelligence Estimate to evaluate the threats to national security that are posed by abrupt climate change associated with greenhouse gas emissions.

Develop a visionary undertaking to spark new energy alternatives as we move beyond Peak Oil. Do this now to prevent more severe disruptions later, while we still have the fossil fuel resources to make the needed changes. Use the Apollo Alliance's "Ten-Point Plan for Good Jobs and Energy Independence" as a guideline to accomplish this vital goal.

Work with the Rocky Mountain Institute to develop a national plan to reduce the profligate use of energy and electricity in the United States while creating hundreds of thousands of jobs and improving national security in the process.

Significantly increase the national Corporate Average Economy Standards on all vehicles. Assist the auto industry in retooling, if necessary, and devise a fair plan that gives the government (and taxpayers) financial 'warrants' from Big Auto companies in return for investments in them. Such a plan would have ensured that taxpayers would have benefited, not just investors and speculators, when the auto companies recovered from the bailout during the credit crisis.

Invest in developing cleaner uses of coal such as coal gasification and the sequestration of carbon dioxide. Assess higher taxes on "dirty" uses of coal.

Pass legislation like the proposed Climate Security Act with strong provisions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and diminish the pending impacts of climate disruption by using direct green taxes or a carbon emissions trading system.

Help the developing world -- China, Russia, and India in particular -- with clean energy technologies in order to reduce the terrible impacts that the increased use of coal will have on the global climate over the coming decades.

Shift subsidies from polluting industries to clean industries by using tax incentives to encourage energy conservation, efficiency measures and alternative energy sources. In particular, give greater subsidies to solar power, and reduce subsidies to Big Oil and the nuclear industry.

Restore the American railroad system to a much better level of service, and invest in faster trains and more frequent and convenient schedules.

Establish a new tax on all air travel tickets in recognition of the exceptionally harmful effect of high altitude greenhouse gas emissions. Use the proceeds to fund carbon-neutral offsets in emissions-trading programs designed to mitigate the impacts of jet fuel combustion in the upper atmosphere.

Create clean energy generation by advancing non-polluting gasification techniques that use municipal, agricultural and industrial wastes.

Provide better incentives for sustainable forestry practices.

Develop an Urban Forest Stewardship Initiative to prevent the decline of urban forests so that cities become cooler, cleaner, healthier and more livable.

Strengthen building code restrictions on risky building and development in floodplains, and stop funding "repetitive-loss" properties.

Reduce property taxes on pedestrian shopping districts, and increase property taxes on large malls.

Create and empower an Intergovernmental Panel on Biodiversity to protect species against extinctions that are being caused by habitat destruction, stimulated consumerism, climate change and other human activities.

Establish more Marine Reserves where fishing and oil drilling are banned in order to protect ocean coastal zones from pollution and over-fishing.

Advance a "catch shares" fishery management approach to solve the serious problem of overfishing in the world's oceans.

Make it a priority to reduce runoff pollution of nitrogen-based fertilizers, sewage, oil, and industrial animal-farm wastes to prevent ocean dead zones and red tides in coastal waters.

Prevent the Navy from using high-intensity sonar that can severely disturb, injure, and kill marine mammals in the world's oceans.

Protect America's coastlines and the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge from oil spills and risky drilling.

Drastically reduce winter access of noisy, polluting snowmobiles in Yellowstone National Park.

Find ways to reduce the production of wastes. REDUCE and REUSE. RECYCLE and ROT (compost) where these activities are cost effective. And productively and intelligently REDESIGN, to improve production processes of goods and services.

Pass legislation that significantly reduces the amounts of non-recyclable plastics and non-degradable Styrofoam that are produced, and increase the number of products sold that are packaged in recyclable materials (like plastics with recycling codes 1 and 2). Provide incentives to make sure that such recyclable plastics are actually recycled. Such initiatives will save energy and reduce the amount of waste that is discarded in landfills.

Develop mechanisms that eliminate always-on natural gas pilot lights and wasted energy caused by continuously having instant hot water in residences and workplaces.

Reduce the production of toxic wastes. Do this by mandating the inclusion in the price of every product or service an allowance for the full cost of pollution mitigation and clean-up costs that are related to the activity.

Outlaw outfall pipes that spew PCB's, heavy metals, and other toxic wastes into rivers, lakes and oceans.

Create a new Superfund to clean up closed mines, toxic waste sites, factory farm pollution, hazardous wastes and abandoned factories. Do this by implementing new taxes on industries that are involved in creating these environmental problems.

Demand an executive order that allows businesses which "round down" cash transactions to refuse to handle pennies. This initiative, embraced by *thinkOOB.com*, will reduce the production of costly, zinc wasting, pollution-causing pennies for cash transactions.

Create tax disincentives that tend to slightly discourage families from having more than two children per couple.

Help save whales, polar bears AND the human race by studying the ideas in this Agenda, as well as the ideas in *One Dozen Big Initiatives to Positively Make America Great Again*.

"Honesty is the first chapter in the book of wisdom."

--- Thomas Jefferson

::: Foreign Policy Priorities :::

Adhere to the principles of just war, especially the understandings of proportional responses. We must not act unilaterally; we are not omniscient. If we cannot persuade other nations with similar interests and similar values of the merits of proposed uses of military power, we should not proceed unilaterally.

Recognize the wisdom in Mark Twain's observation: *"It is easier to stay out than get out."*

Unilaterally reduce military spending for new generations of nuclear missiles, bunker-buster nuclear weapons, Star Wars initiatives, and depleted uranium munitions.

Find ways to drastically reduce the production and planting of land mines in the world.

Outlaw the production and export of cruelly indiscriminate cluster bombs from the U.S.

Refocus and re-prioritize national security spending so that it is proportional to actual risks.

Strive to ensure that our military activities are not responsible for harming and killing innocent people.

Empower the International Criminal Court, located in The Hague, Netherlands, to more effectively prevent the use of warfare to settle international disputes.

Learn more about our 'enemies' and the dynamics of our foreign policy in order to avoid making mistakes that have led us to war. Recognize the compelling insights that Robert McNamara, the Secretary of Defense during the Vietnam War, shared in the 2003 film *"The Fog of War"*. These include the fact that Americans misjudge enemies and exaggerate the dangers of their actions, partially because of our ignorance of the history, culture, politics and experiences of people abroad. Find better ways to comprehend perspectives of people in other nations through greater efforts to cultivate empathetic insight and to understand opposing points of view.

"An inglorious peace is better than a dishonorable war."

--- Mark Twain

Congratulate ourselves for having repealed the discriminatory "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy that allows gays and lesbians to serve openly in the U.S. military.

Close the detention center at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and prohibit prisoner renditions and torture.

Strengthen the training on human rights, the Geneva Conventions, and the value of civilian control of the military at the U.S. Army School of the Americas, located in Fort Benning, Georgia (renamed the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation in the year 2000), because of its strong ties to oppressive U.S. foreign policy and its ideological extremism. Too many men have been trained there who have perpetrated human rights atrocities and other scurrilous activities in Latin American countries.

Develop powerfully effective ways to mitigate and marginalize extremism in world affairs, and focus on reducing religious conflicts between Islam and Christianity.

Rein in the ruthlessness and law violations of covert operations abroad.

Strengthen the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) to staunch Big Brother trends of increased spying on American citizens by the government, and rein in abuses of power that were first asserted by the Bush/Cheney administration.

Foster a greater concern for the integrity of habitats and biodiversity on all military bases and in all military decision-making.

Provide financial support for a worldwide school lunch program, sponsored by Uncle Sam and other developed countries. The program should guarantee one meal a day for all school children in every country. This initiative would dramatically improve nutrition, literacy and opportunity, especially for girls. It would also stimulate understanding, improve our international image, and cost only as much per year as one aircraft carrier each year.



End the 50-year-long economic embargo against Cuba.

Increase write-offs of international debt in order to benefit the world's poorest countries.

Support international family planning efforts by committing funds to both domestic and international programs whose goal is to reduce unwanted pregnancies.

::: Government Priorities :::

Radically improve government operations by reducing waste, inefficiency and bureaucracy.

Skillfully, intelligently and appropriately reduce the size of the Federal Government. Make the government more public-interest oriented and effective and frugal instead of being extravagant with taxpayer funds. Downsize it by 5% over the next 3 years through employee attrition and affordable early retirement incentives.

Curtail the power of corporate interests to trump public interests when it comes to public protections, environmental safeguards, and scientific integrity.

Redefine the legal role of corporations in our society to exclude them from exercising the same rights of citizenship as individuals, and eliminate the most blatant of corporate abuses of power that harm our democracy and natural environment.

Implement effective means of preventing corporations from evading state and federal "corrupt practices acts" that relate to political influence peddling.

Increase the transparency of government and the accountability of elected officials, and end government secrecy in order to reduce fraud, accounting shenanigans, dishonesty, deceptive political practices, and cronyism.

Strengthen our democracy by reducing the anti-democratic influences of media concentration, assaults on a free press, deceptive government propaganda, "fake news", and yellow journalism.

Reinforce the Freedom of Information Act to more honestly require openness and accountability in government, and strengthen the mandate for federal agencies to provide initial responses to citizen requests and then accurate information in a timely manner.

Approve publicly-financed Clean Money/Clean Elections legislation and Congressional Ethics reforms to reduce the influence of Big Money in our political system.

Pass the Disclose Act to restore transparency to national elections by requiring the disclosure of corporate and union spending for candidates for public office.

Enact legislation or a Constitutional Amendment to reverse the anti-democratic *Citizens United* ruling by the Supreme Court.

Defend and enforce the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and strengthen the rights of all citizens to vote, and prevent all manner of interference with the voting process.

Elect the President and Vice President by direct popular vote, and eliminate the antiquated Electoral College system.

Ensure that elections are fairer by protecting against purges of minority voters and the use of "caging lists" to suppress voter participation.

Take steps to make sure that computerized voting machines have verifiable paper trails and are not vulnerable to fraudulent "black box" manipulations of results.

Do away with political district gerrymandering entirely in every state.

Strengthen the 1972 Federal Advisory Committee Act, with the clear goal of making the government more open and ensuring a balanced representation of viewpoints to broaden the influences of special interests on public policy decision-making.

Defend the Constitutional separation of powers to ensure that Executive Privilege does not unduly trump the legislative and judicial branches of government.

Reinstate the Ethics in Government Act that expired in 1999 to ensure that the nation's president is more accountable to the people.

Conduct a massive review of all classified documents from the George W. Bush administration and release to the public those that have been inappropriately restricted from the attention of citizens and the media and historians.

Insist that Congress adequately performs its oversight responsibilities, particularly in areas of fraud, misrepresentation and war profiteering.

Improve disaster preparedness and the robustness of emergency response systems, and reduce the wastefulness of pork barrel spending on "Homeland Security".

Make serious reductions in "earmarks" in such legislation as highway bills, Farm Bill subsidies, and military appropriations.

Create an Office of Public Integrity that is independent of Congress and the White House to rein in lobbyists and ensure more ethical government.

For all no-bid contracts given to companies during emergencies like disaster reconstruction and wars, require that the receiving company pay a profiteering tax for all profit increases that result from the contracts.

Reduce subsidies and loopholes that benefit certain industries, especially ones that are harmful to the public's health and well-being, like Big Oil, Coal, Nuclear, Tobacco and Gambling.

Make sure that government agencies responsible for protecting the public's interests, like the Food and Drug Administration, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of the Interior, the Department of Agriculture, and the Department of Health and Human Services do not have their primary purposes subverted by partisan administrators, political operatives, special interests, corporate lobbyists, or religious fanatics.

Demand that Congress act to ensure the Internet remains open, nondiscriminatory and neutral in order to keep the Internet open to all citizens and to protect free speech online.

Strengthen the important principle of the separation of Church and State to keep any religious dogma from unfairly influencing our schools and government.

Make laws stricter that concern the sale and possession of handguns, assault weapons and automatic weapons that have excessive magazine clips, and make background checks universal.

Support research on gun violence and encourage mental health providers to get involved in gun regulation and the promotion of safe gun ownership.

Create better protections for the majority from the unreasonable tyranny of the minority in power; AND create better protections for the fair rights of minorities from the tyranny of the majority.

Create federal Civil Grand Juries of responsible citizens that are independent of the White House and Congress, and give them responsibility for making recommendations to improve government. All of the States in the U.S. should also empower civil Grand Juries of citizens at the County level to help improve local government.

Assess an additional 5% federal tax on all gambling winnings in excess of \$1,000 at casinos, and use the proceeds to invest in addressing problems caused by addictive gambling.

Tell your political representatives in no uncertain terms that you want them to STOP trying to divide us, deceive us, distract our attention from domestic challenges, betray our trust, cheat us, bait us with hot button issues, and make us more insecure; and insist that they get on with high priority tasks of making America and the world more fair, more just, more honestly secure, more sustainable, more fiscally responsible, and more ecologically sound.

"The fundamental cause of trouble in the world today is that the stupid are cock-sure,  
while the intelligent are full of doubt."

--- Bertrand Russell

::: Social Justice Priorities :::

Consider fairness and social justice in all decision-making.

Leave a propitious legacy to future generations through far-sighted policies that protect the many "services" provided by natural ecosystems, and help ensure we do not leave our children with depleted resources, a polluted commons, a less stable climate, and unsupportable levels of national debt.

Ratify a Bill of Rights for Future Generations, as advocated by the Cousteau Society and as specifically proposed in the Earth Manifesto.

Establish a Precautionary Social Principle that enshrines a fair and bipartisan concern for the common good as a higher value than narrow doctrine or divisive partisanship or foolishly shortsighted inequalitarian policies.

Convene a Commission to determine: 1) how global economic activities can be carried out in more ethical contexts, 2) how social justice can be valued in addition to private profit-making, and 3) how both economics and ethics can integrate an overarching respect for ecological truths and long-term considerations.

Organize international cultural, artistic and intellectual exchanges that promote mutual understanding and respect between nations, and seek to thereby penetrate the fog that envelops nationalistic ethnocentricity.

Create greater environmental justice, ensuring that poor communities do not suffer disproportionately from the effects of pollution, toxins, violence, and diseases caused by environmental degradation.

Find better ways to reduce economic inequalities and the economic insecurity of the majority of Americans.

Create an efficient, fair and affordable system of universal healthcare in America.

Require the federal Medicare program to negotiate prescription drug prices directly with pharmaceutical companies in order to reduce program costs.

Ensure that veterans are not betrayed and short-changed by society when they return from war. Support programs like those advocated by Veterans for America ([VeteransforAmerica.org](http://VeteransforAmerica.org)), including a VA care system that is not overwhelmed and that does not have a long backlog of veterans awaiting basic care.

Revoke the most controversial provisions of the Military Commissions Act that legalizes extreme interrogation techniques.

Support environmental organizations that are striving to make the world a better place.

Reevaluate mortgage interest deductions and tax-free exclusions on home sales so that they are not so heavily skewed in favor of high-income tax payers.

Change bankruptcy laws to be fairer, especially with regard to student loan debt.

Find ways to reduce credit card interest rates and to reduce predatory banking, usury and inequities involved in the profiteering of banks at the expense of poor people.

Create better programs worldwide to educate and empower girls and women.

Fully fund Title X domestic family planning, and allow over-the-counter sale of Plan B emergency contraception.

Encourage sexual self-responsibility and the use of contraception in family planning.

Stop the anti-abortion war. We simply cannot afford to divert our attention, our time, and our resources into forcing women to bear unwanted children. Pass a Constitutional Amendment to guarantee the right to women to have an abortion in the first trimester of pregnancy to assure that the Supreme Court's fair-minded *Roe vs. Wade* decision is codified into law.

Demand that all established churches reform their policies related to women's rights and roles in their organizations so that women are treated more fairly and more respectfully.

Pressure the Catholic Church to (1) stop essentially forbidding fertility to those who WANT to bear children, but aren't able to (i.e., demand that the Church stop opposing surrogate motherhood, artificial insemination, and in-vitro fertilization), and (2) stop essentially making fertility mandatory for those who are able to conceive, but DON'T WANT to (i.e., demand that the Church stop opposing contraception and abortion). As Mark Twain pointed out, "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."

Pass an International Violence Against Women Act to fund local programs and services that will help end the most brutal forms of violence against women, including honor killings, bride burnings, genital mutilation, mass rapes in war, and domestic violence.

Take bold and effective steps to stop international sex-slave trafficking, which so cruelly harms hundreds of thousands of girls and women worldwide.

Enact truly comprehensive and fair-minded immigration reform in the United States.

Grant more visas to highly skilled foreigners who have advanced degrees from American universities in the "STEM" fields — science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

Protect "whistleblowers" to encourage them to blow the whistle on violations of the law and on government waste, fraud and corruption.

Ensure a free press and more integrity and impartiality in journalistic ethics, and reinstate the Fairness Doctrine in broadcast media.

Act to reduce the trend toward increasing domination of newspaper and television media by corporate entities.

Switch your long-distance telephone service to companies like CREDO, a progressive phone company that contributes millions of dollars to good causes and opposes the National Security Agency's illegal mining of telephone call records.

Find ways to help ensure that workers are paid living wages. Increase the minimum wage along with inflation, and devise programs that share the benefits realized from productivity increases with the workers who help make them happen.

Reduce working hours by 5% in the United States, where the average worker works 500 hours a year more than the average German. Or guarantee workers an additional week of vacation each year to reduce stress and improve the quality of their life experiences, and to allow more wholesome connectedness with family, friends, and nature. Overwork contributes to higher energy consumption, more pollution, consumerism, and less fulfilling life experiences.

Support changes in atavistic laws in the remaining seven states that make it illegal for heterosexual couples to live together. Shame on North Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia, Florida, Mississippi, Idaho and Michigan for their stubbornness in retaining these laws!

Enact a federal ban on job discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender workers to make our laws consistent with existing federal civil rights laws that ban job discrimination based on race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age or disability.

Encourage new religious sensibilities that honor healthy values, Golden Rule fairness and sustainable existence and a spirituality that respects other beings and the health of our home planet. And let's simultaneously find ways to emasculate the aspects of established religions that contribute to supremacist conflicts, terrorism and wars.

"You can't depend on your judgment when your imagination is out of focus."

--- Mark Twain

::: Education Priorities :::

Invest in higher quality and more well-rounded public educational instruction, and increase spending on infrastructure, modern equipment and materials in all public schools.

Devise ways to defeat counterproductive aspects of the tenure system in schools.

Provide better pre-school and child development programs, and make public schools safer.

Make education at all levels more affordable to people on the lower economic rungs of society by increasing Pell grants and reducing interest rates on student loans.

Take steps to ensure that more students succeed in graduating from high school and college.

Invest in higher education disciplines that are becoming relatively weak in the U.S., including math, science and engineering.

Teach a comprehensive curriculum at all levels of public schools that emphasizes critical thinking and good communication skills, not just rote memorization.

Teach students about ethics, philosophy, self-understanding, individual responsibility, social obligations, ecological ideas, long-term perspective and comparative religion studies.

Expose students to the Arts, and encourage openness and creativity.

Increase federal funding of public libraries, doubling the level of funding for the Library Services and Technology Act (\$185 million in FY 2012), and re-instating funds for the Innovative Approaches to Literacy program.

Ensure that children receive honest sexual education at an appropriate age.

Give local leaders a greater voice in education decisions, and minimize the extent to which the federal government and religious establishments influence the curricula in public schools.

Provide a context of respectful and empathetic tolerance for differences and diversity amongst people by promoting a sensible Golden Rule approach to bold initiatives designed to achieve greater justice.

Encourage documentary film-making with tax incentives to help provide people with a greater depth of understanding of important issues.

"It is wiser to find out than to suppose."

--- Mark Twain

::: Legal System Priorities :::

Limit the terms of federal judges to 12 years, including those who serve on the Supreme Court. This would make the judicial system more responsive to changing societal needs.

Restore the right to habeas corpus and fair detention and timely trials.

Invest in effective programs to significantly reduce freed prisoner recidivism rates and to alleviate the crowding of prisons and the spiraling costs of locking up more and more people.

Reinforce our national commitment to the Geneva Conventions related to the fair treatment of prisoners of war and civilians in times of war.

Reduce jury size from 12 to 7 for non-felony cases to save money and citizen's time.

Protect the right to sue, and also find ways to reduce truly "frivolous lawsuits".

Adopt national No Fault automobile insurance.

Fight drug and alcohol abuse by creating programs that address causes of substance abuse.

Make medical marijuana legal nationwide to allow people to mitigate pain and suffering through its use.

Demand that Congress reclassify marijuana from a Schedule I drug under the Federal Controlled Substances Act of 1970 to a Schedule II drug, recognizing the fact that marijuana, like other Schedule II drugs such as morphine and opium, has accepted medical uses.

Resolve the conflict between federal and state laws concerning marijuana to clarify them for local community decision-making.

Stop the harsh Prohibition against marijuana by de-criminalizing its recreational use. Regulate it and tax it heavily to deal with other more serious drug and alcohol problems. The incarceration of thousands of people in jails and prisons on minor drug offenses has serious and lasting negative consequences. Such policies are costly, ineffective and extreme, and they ruin the lives of hundreds of thousands of people for minor offenses.

Make prostitution safe and legal. Tax it to finance health and safety measures for sex workers. Provide support to women involved in prostitution who want to escape the terrible cycle of inadequate opportunity and desperation.

"Be careless in your dress if you must, but keep a tidy soul."

--- Mark Twain

::: Health Priorities :::

Find ways to encourage the health and well-being of people in our societies, and to diminish our reliance on prescription drugs and surgery.

Educate people about preventative medicine and a healthy diet, and encourage effective exercise and nutrition programs to combat obesity.

Make fast foods healthier by reducing the use of "trans fatty acids" and hydrogenated and partially hydrogenated oils in processed foods and in restaurants.

Invest in improving our systems for diagnosing diseases and afflictions.

Dramatically reform the latest extension of the federal Farm Bill to reduce subsidies for the overproduction of corn and soybeans, and to make our food and farmlands healthier, and to mitigate pollution, and to improve childhood nutrition and public health, and to stimulate conservation programs, and to make production methods more sustainable and humane.

Embrace the slow-foods movement to alter the unhealthy aspects of the American diet, and to appreciate healthy food and connect better with our bodies and families.

Enact legislation to require labeling of genetically engineered foods so that people can make better informed decisions about their use and the potential risks of foods made from genetically modified plants and animals.

Recognize the greater rights of people currently alive than of fetuses by supporting both women's reproductive rights and stem-cell research to conquer diseases and afflictions.

Make a more serious commitment to fighting AIDS in Africa and elsewhere by providing free contraceptives to those who are most at risk, and make HIV drugs more affordable.

Enact the Freedom of Choice Act to staunch the trend towards governmental interference and discrimination and invasions of privacy and liberty in women's reproductive decisions.

Support a program to cover everyone with some form of healthcare insurance coverage, and eliminate the power of insurance companies to discriminate against people with "preexisting conditions". Pay for national health insurance for all 48 million Americans who currently have none by reducing the bureaucratic costs and coverage denials that are incurred each year under the current system.

Require that healthcare plans cover contraceptives, because contraceptives help prevent unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Eliminate coverage for recreational drugs like Viagra that effectively encourage unwanted pregnancies and STDs.

Ratify the global tobacco treaty to prevent tobacco addiction and related diseases.

Create programs that encourage the connection young people have with nature and outdoors.

Respect greater comfort and dignity in dying. Support hospice and palliative care efforts and keep the government out of end-of-life decisions and right-to-die issues.

Discourage costly and futile medical treatment ordeals in the final days of the lives of terminally ill patients, and educate people about social benefits of green burials and conservation burial grounds.

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Let us together IMAGINE a better world --- "It's easy if you try", as John Lennon sang.

We have the power to change the world to make it a far better place. Let us be yea-sayers rather than naysayers in a committed striving to actualize this better world! These ideas are a summary of insights from the far more extensive writings that can be found in the Earth Manifesto.

Truly,  
Dr. Tiffany B. Twain

Addendum. In thinking about needed reforms of marijuana laws, it is illuminating to watch *Reefer Madness*, the 1936 camp-classic movie that is an anti-pot morality play. It is curious that the term *reefer madness* has come to mean much more than a supposed insanity caused by using marijuana, and now is often used to refer to the lunacy caused by excessive and zealous devotion to the *prohibition* of marijuana. This seems apropos, because even journals like *Scientific American* published claptrap like the following in 1938: "Marijuana is a more dangerous drug than heroin or cocaine. It still adheres to old word traditions of murder, assault, rape, physical demoralization and mental breakdown!"

Such panic-inducing propaganda proliferated in the pages of 1930s American newsprint. Wildly unscientific rants like this no doubt scared millions of anguished parents, and unintentionally aroused the curiosity of the younger generation in this drug. Long before Americans were paranoid with the threat of finding 'Reds under their beds', marijuana was the latest unspeakable scourge from foreign sands, "a foul narcotic corrupting the youth of its great country." Innocent hemp workers worrying, and growing fears quickly led to the creation of the Marijuana Transfer Tax Act in 1937, which imposed harsh strictures on the growing and use of the plant. The bill largely passed through efforts of an overly-zealous civil servant, Harry Anslinger, and 'evidence' from the right-wing newspaper headlines of William Randolph Hearst.

It was during this particular climate of American paranoia that the cult anti-drug propaganda movie *Tell Your Children* (1936) was unleashed upon the country to save its children from the terror of the munchies, to show concerned parents how this drug menace was the "real/public enemy number one!" Financed by a small, yet earnest church group, the movie revealed the "true" horrors of the demon weed, and its incredible, uncanny

ability to transform well-adjusted youngsters into uncontrollable, horny and ultimately murderous dope fiends who constantly twitch with laughter and listen to lascivious sounds called jazz.

A smart film producer named Dwain Esper quickly acquired the rights, cut in a few more salacious moments and slapped on the sensational title, *Reefer Madness*. The film became "an underground exploitation smash", and made Dwain Esper a small fortune, though after some years the movie fell into relative filmic obscurity.

Then in 1998, *Reefer Madness* was remade into a musical satire of the 1936 cult classic, and it quite an entertaining production to behold. Since the musical parodies the American paranoia surrounding marijuana, it is well worth the time spent watching it. "Fantastical musical numbers are used throughout the motion picture to tell its story, with song and dance routines that explode with Technicolor glory. Polynesian jungle orgies, ice cream parlor swing-jazz jives, wild sex parties, dancing prisoners and their wardens, a psychedelic animated sequence, flesh-eating reefer zombies and even a Tom Jones-style singing Jesus fill the screen with wild abandonment. The movie is nothing short of a riot, a wicked blending of John Waters' gross humor and sentiment, Richard O'Brien's warped rock 'n' roll, Busby Berkeley's aerial photography, and Vincente Minnelli's razzle-dazzle."

Check it out!