

Common Sense

A reasonable way forward for America

Anonymous

Introduction

Is democracy in America threatened? One could certainly make the case that our culture is more divided, distracted and prone to violence toward our fellow Americans than it has been in one hundred and sixty years.

One could safely suggest we Americans have lost our "common sense." That we have forgotten we have a responsibility to each other to ensure the wellbeing of our nation in addition to our rights as individuals. To honestly debate with each other what WE, the people, want America to stand for moving forward.

To be sure, there are many moving pieces in how we could respond to our current challenges in the spirit of democracy. The brilliance of our founding documents is that they are amendable to meet new situations that our founders could not imagine when America was a fledgling confederation of 13 colonies. Perhaps it is a sign of hope for us in this moment.

*In all the possibilities we can consider to update or strengthen our democratic norms, it is important to ask ourselves what **challenge** are we trying to solve before we get into the detail of how we might accomplish it.*

Democracy's gift is that it ensures that we the people determine our fate unfettered by an authoritarian ruler or a small minority of powerful individuals. Its challenge is that it is a messy process to align competing agendas for the common good of the nation. The process of democracy is at best uncertain and sometimes requires more effort to decide what to do when compared to an authoritarian state which can make such decisions impulsively, imperially.

Capitalism is also part of our founding doctrines. The idea that any person, regardless of their birth circumstances, gender or race can determine their own success unrestrained by those in power was and is revolutionary.

Capitalism at its best provides an open marketplace for innovation for individuals to better themselves. It is also challenged at the moment because a small group of wealthy individuals and corporations are attempting to control the marketplace exclusively for their own gain. Our planet is currently being damaged by this pure pursuit of profits.

Our current debates concerning potential threats to our democracy are complex. Be wary of anyone that attempts to steer the debate into an overload of confusing detail before identifying what current challenge needs to be solved.

If, as it was in the beginning, the American system is still intended to express the will of the people, the debate about the nature of that inquiry in the 21st century needs to be simply framed before turning to ways to accomplish it.

In other words, we need to decide what are we trying to solve? Do we still want a nation that is governed by democratic norms for all its citizens or an oligarchy that is controlled by the rich and powerful.?

*Any attempt to obscure our democratic intentions in an overload of details can be seen for what it is. An attempt to paralyze citizens from taking any action at all. This must be guarded against. **IF** there is a course correction necessary, those currently in power will attempt to defend the old order against new innovations intended to ensure the American democratic experiment thrives in the 21st Century. Often*

times when someone complicates the debate it is because it is in their best interest to keep Americans confused, divided and overwhelmed.

To be sure, it is more difficult to discern the will of the people when our political system is so awash in partisan dark money. However, national polling on issues like election reform, fair taxation and equal opportunity suggest that a healthy majority of Americans want to ensure our democratic norms better serve all of us regardless of race, gender or creed. They desire *common sense* solutions to the challenges we face that ensure country over party.

Yet our national leadership seems to currently operate in an isolated bubble of their own making, beholden to re-election politics and driven by the desires of the wealthy and the powerful to continue dictating policies that best serve their interests.

Currently one political party seems so desperate to stay in power that it is attempting to literally suppress the rights of all Americans to vote. The party on the other side of the aisle seems so determined to counter this distortion of democracy that it forgets to really listen to the American public that didn't vote for them.

We have for the longest time assumed our experiment in democracy would always continue despite the on-going challenges. In the past, American democracy has always found a way to move forward when threatened. So why would this time be any different?

For one thing history has not been kind to democracies. They eventually end up collapsing into something else in time

frames like we are currently faced with. Citizens come to believe the defense of their democratic rights is too difficult or unnecessary. In those moments some speak of settling for a level of false comfort regardless of what they had to give up to whatever deep state is attempting to exercise control.

*The cause of democracy in America is also the concern of all human beings on the planet. **IF** the light of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness dims in our shining city on the hill, other less democratic forces in the world will move to fill the gap globally, colonizing all that exist outside the palaces of the oligarchies rich and powerful or the favored rulers of totalitarian states.*

...Anonymous

Common Sense

On the true DEEP STATE and Oligarchy .

America has been under white, male control since its inception. Only relatively recently have women and people of color been added to the electorate of American voters.

However, the true deep state is still primarily made up of wealthy and powerful men from both sides of the political aisle. And the nature of how these men govern is neither democratic or totalitarian, but a hybrid that many are beginning to call... an oligarchy.

While both conservatives and liberals have attempted to brand the other as a deep state that needs to be unmasked and suppressed, in actuality it is the wealthy on both sides of the aisle that currently dictate where American is going and WHO wins. The recent revelations of how the ultra-wealthy avoid paying any income taxes is one example.

When we look OUT into the world we have a tendency to divide nations into democratic and totalitarian systems of governance. However, an oligarchy is a hybrid system of centralized governance that does not openly exercise its control over its citizens through the dictates of one dictator or party committee. Rather it exercises its power behind the scenes, orchestrated by a loosely organized group made up of powerful politicians, bankers, CEO's, corporate media and the military. It may currently appear that democratic checks and balances in America are in place, but in reality these norms have not proven strong enough lately to check the wealthy

who see themselves as above the rules that apply to all the rest of us.

American oligarchs currently maintain certain agreements with each other that impact everything about the now and the future of America as defined by its economic, political and social policies. The "crumbs" thrown to the majority of US citizens could be called... distractions. Think about things we are encouraged to obsess about... sports, video games, celebrity gossip, social media memes, the alt right vs. the socialist left etc. Beyond the collective activity these pastimes offer, they also play a role in keeping Americans occupied and not asking too many questions.

From time to time this loosely knit group of American oligarchs is dominated by one tribe or another. This makes this oligarchy style of governance unstable. For example, the Obama years followed by Trumps one term in office is the most recent example of radical swings from progressive left to radical right dictated by a few thousand votes in three swing states.

Over time an oligarchy is also not stable because it has a tendency to be greedy. An oligarchy keeps squeezing the masses until the forgotten finally light the torches and storm the wealthy's gated neighborhoods. Even when white collared criminals are caught operating illegally they are rarely really punished.

Since the latest incarnation of this rule by the wealthy that began in 1980, the current group of American oligarchs have been smart enough to give the masses just enough hope and reward to keep them vaguely satisfied and occupied. But make no mistake about it...the ultimate goal of an oligarchy is

to control the national narrative with its attendant political and economic rules, so the favored few retain the power to acquire obscene amounts of wealth. When either political party claims the system is rigged... they are partially correct, but not in the partisan way that claim is usually meant.

Oligarchies can fail. Their undoing usually occurs because of some unexpected event that is beyond their control. The current Covid pandemic is one such potential X factor that exposed the corruption and the incompetence of American oligarchs.

As much as we believe that a minority of powerful individuals and organizations have always dictated who in America benefits, there have been times when more American citizens shared in its bounty. Following the Civil War, the emancipation of black slaves radically changed American economic culture, even though equal opportunity for people of color is still a challenged work in progress.

Following World War II, a dramatic rise in the fortunes of the middle class spread the wealth of America to a much larger portion of the population. Even recently, big tech startups initially prided themselves on disrupting entrenched corporate monopolies, but then were co-opted into the current system of privileged shareholder wealth that rewards less the 1% of the American population.

Lately, it has been openly discussed that capitalism does not necessarily need democratic norms to thrive anymore. As white conservatives and libertarians continue to push for less government and unregulated marketplaces those efforts tend to target regulations and rules designed to protect American citizens from the excesses of the rich and powerful. They claim

these regulations are a barrier to innovation. This is a false narrative promoted by the powerful.

Since 1980 and the emergence of the “trickledown economics” narrative that falsely postulates that rewarding the rich “trickles down” benefits to everyone else, the percentage of American wealth has continue to consolidate in less than 1% of the population. For example, never before in our history have we allowed one company like Google to control 90% of the marketplace they do business in.

IF this trend is allowed to continue, democracy as America has known it will be replaced more and more by an oligarchy of the rich and powerful.

On WHO benefits from our current culture wars.

*Intentional distractions potentially keep Americans from truly identifying the dangers our democracy is facing. One such distraction is the much discussed “culture war” between the right and the left. While it is true that Republican, Democrat and Independent voters do have some different viewpoints, the **real culture war** is between the rich and the powerful and the rest of us.*

While it is easy to focus our ire on those seemingly promoting an opposite political point of view, American oligarchs include wealthy individuals and organizations on both sides of the aisle. They may publicly disagree on the role of national government or the benefits of a universal healthcare system, but most of these privileged members of both parties don't disagree on taking dark money from wealthy individuals and corporations for their re-election campaigns. Or keeping the current electoral college system in place even though it now

produces distorted results that favor minority vs. the majority control intended by our founders.

They also don't disagree on spending more money on our military than all other nations on Earth combined, including our sworn enemies, while limiting social programs that would benefit the majority of Americans.

IF we let distractions keep us from looking too closely at the what is really happening behind the scenes, our inaction may bring about the demise of democracy as we have known it. The false culture war between conservatives and liberals keeps us unnaturally divided from our fellow citizens and unable to unite against continuing to slide down the slippery slope towards a oligarchy system of governance.

On how partisan dark money distorts the WILL of the people

The constitution does not mention political parties, although there was much concern among our founders that political parties could polarize the electorate. The constitution also does not mention how elections are to be funded.

In the beginning, national elections were decided by a very small group of landed gentry, all men. Over time, the national election process grew in complexity to the point that massive campaign financing became necessary to a politicians re-election. That gave those contributing to political campaigns an unfair advantage over those that didn't. Donations that came from the wealthy and the powerful arrived with strings attached. The larger the donations the more influence these donors had on our policies going forward.

The second factor that skewed our national politics in favor of big money is the Federal courts declaring corporations were “people” with all the rights afforded individual Americans.

Corporations were initially intended to provide protection for individuals taking financial risks. If a corporation went bankrupt, the individual owners wealth could be protected from the claims of creditors. This was intended to make taking financial risks more attractive.

Making corporations “persons” however meant they could act as deep pocketed individuals “purchasing” influence. An additional ruling handed down by a pro-business Supreme Court identified these contributions as “free speech” opening the way for unlimited dark money to be anonymously donated to political PACS. These court rulings have undermined the intentions of the founders, giving the rich and powerful much more say in how our politicians vote.

IF we allow these “distortions” of our election system to pollute the original intent of our founders of “one person, one vote” the flood of dark money in politics could continue to influence the results of national officials in favor of the rich and powerful. In a sense, the system is rigged for monied interests, the true deep state.

*On what happens when the US federal court system becomes
POLITIZED*

The original intention of our founders was that our federal court system would be neutral, ruling from a position of objectivity on the actions of the President, the congress and the nation. A type of influence that would provide checks and balances on the politically powerful. That is why the founders

did not require limits on federal judges terms. They received "lifetime" appointments.

Whatever was originally intended, the Federal court system including the Supreme Court rapidly became politicized. Each party attempted to nominate and confirm judges that would rule in favor of their political positions.

Over the years the Supreme Court has changed in size in terms of the total number of judges, but has always retained conservative vs. liberal factions that can change with the election of a new administration. At times the court has had a very liberal leaning and sometimes a very conservative leaning like we have at the present with conservatives in the majority by 6-3.

The result of the unintended politicization of the Federal court system is that rulings that impact the economic, social and political lives of voters skew politically one way or another, causing a fluctuation over time that does not provide objective stability. Many observers note that recent Supreme Court rulings go far beyond ruling on the constitutionality of a law or practice and instead establish new precedents that fundamentally undermine the intentions of our founders. One example of this is the recent gutting of the 1965 voting act claiming that protections for people of color voting rights were not necessary anymore. This amounted to a political judgement of current cultural conditions that is not based in fact.

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On the need to prosecute those that would THREATEN our democratic norms

In theory, the American system of governance has safeguards built in that protect citizens from the illegal or unethical acts of their politicians. These safeguards have evolved over the years to meet new challenges as they arose. Unfortunately, we need to strengthen these safe guards again.

The Trump administration, by all factual accounts, was one of the most corrupt in modern American history. The only reason Trump himself was not impeached twice was that his true believers in the Senate blocked all legal attempts to do so.

In addition to what Trump and his family members did to enrich themselves, nine top Trump advisors and multiple cabinet secretaries came under investigation, many were convicted and imprisoned before Trump pardoned them.

In addition to those that actually went to prison, there were numerous others like Bill Barr, the head of the Justice Department under Trump, who acted illegally in lying to congress and the American people about the findings of the Mueller Report among other things. He has yet to be charged with a crime.

There are also numerous Republicans that continue to repeat Trumps BIG Lie that he won the 2020 election. This misinformation directly led to the attack on the Capital on January 6th. They have also claimed that the Covid Pandemic is a hoax. This has caused the deaths of citizens in both blue

and red states. Conservative media outlets also continue to lie to their audiences in ways that go far beyond the boundaries of truthful reporting, all to improve their ratings.

Numerous times Democrats in Congress tried to subpoena members of the Trump administration to testify under oath, but were blocked by the Trump White House. Some of the grievance actions these officials were complicit in cost people their lives.

Also, the power of Federal agencies inspector general to investigate and put politicians and their staffs under oath needs to evolve from time honored norms to rules and laws that can be enforced.

IF American democracy is going to thrive, the people who break the law and lie to the American people need to be prosecuted so that it never happens again if another rogue administration declares itself above the law.

On the evolution of the NEWS

One contributing factor to our current political polarization is the changes that have taken place in how we citizens receive our news. Just forty years ago, Americans got their news from one of three network evening news programs and print newspapers. At that time, the face of network news, Walter Cronkite, was considered the most trusted man in America. Newspapers were also regulated so they presented stories based on confirmed facts. How times have changed.

Beginning in 1980 with the launch of CNN, news programming became available 24/7. Cable news also birthed a different type of news format called "opinion driven programming."

This format primarily relied on panels of “experts” giving their opinions of the news, instead of objectively reporting on it.

Some attempt was made in the beginning to present views from all sides of the political spectrum, but by the time Fox News launched, cable news networks had fractured into purely liberal and conservative services. The “news” these partisan sources presented often described two different realities while promoting clickbait stories designed to rile up their audiences.

With the launch of Facebooks and Googles news feeds, information took another leap into a dystopian future. In an attempt to “tailor” the news for an individual, powerful software algorithms fueled by the personal profile data collected by these on-line services resulted in the formation of tribal “bubbles” where an individual only saw news that was meant for people who agreed with them.

Traditionally, the “news” from whatever source has always been based on the adage “if it bleeds, it leads.” Sensational stories, often featuring conflict are intentionally served up to get higher ratings or increase the ad rates media corporations can charge. However, this tendency to promote “friction” to increase viewership has continued to expand until currently we have two completely different realities presented to the American public, much of it not based on facts.

American democracy depends on a common set of facts from which citizens can debate. While interpretations of those facts can vary wildly, we need to debate our future based on the same information instead of the “fake” misinformation that is currently being distributed.

IF America does not find a way to return to political debate based on a common set of facts, we could find ourselves ultimately not trusting news services or each other anymore. This citizen "mistrust" is a page right out of the oligarchs playbook. IF nothing is "true," decisions will not be made based on facts, but on propaganda.

On addressing economic DISPARITY between the rich and rest of us

Since humans evolved from primitive tribes there have always been hierarchies of influence and power among any group of human beings. The strong dominated the weak, taking the majority of the spoils created by their tribe for themselves.

As tribes grew into agricultural empires, then into industrial nations and currently into our global network of economic interests, these dominator hierarchies took the majority of wealth created in these societies. This resulted in endless civil warfare as the oppressed attempted to overthrow the power of the favored few.

America in spite of its democratic principles, still has "classes" of citizens that vary from the mega rich to the poor. While it is true that America provides the opportunity for anyone to join the wealthy class, the disparity between the rich, the middle class and the poor has grown in the United States to less than 1% of the population controlling the majority of the wealth America creates.

It has not always been so. There have been times in American history where the wealth was more widely distributed to more

citizens. However, since 1980 we have been in another cycle of dominance by the rich and powerful. Historically, this never turns out well for anybody.

IF America does not level the economic playing field so the vast wealth created in this country is more justly distributed to its citizens, our democracy may erupt again into more civil disturbance that will justify those in power abandoning democratic norms.

On corporate WELFARE

There is much talk about America being a progressive welfare state. It's true, gone are the days that individual citizens had to fend for themselves with no safety net. America has evolved over the years to believe that in a country as rich as ours, no one should starve.

A variety of social programs were created during the great depression of the 1930's and the late 1960's in an attempt to lift up those that have been left out of benefitting from our free enterprise system. Opponents of this social safety net rattle on about poor people being lazy, or worse, wards of a socialist welfare state.

However, the biggest welfare give away in America is the special governmental treatment that big corporations receive. This corporate welfare comes in many forms. Not paying their fair share of taxes and massive government subsidies for corporations already making billions of dollars are two examples.

IF the income disparity between the rich, the middle class and the poor continues to grow, America could digress again into

social strife, as those not included in the corporate welfare state become so desperate, they revolt. This descent into oligarchy and the end of democratic norms in this country is a very real possibility.

On a WEALTH tax

When America was founded there was no individual or corporate income tax. The Federal government, as limited as it was, got their revenue from import taxes called tariffs.

When these import taxes were no longer enough to support a growing Federal government in the early nineteenth century, individuals and corporations "income" was taxed. This became the primary source of Federal government revenue amounting to trillions of dollars.

The Federal income tax system has had its positive and negative impacts, but in the current 21st century world it is totally outmoded as a fair tax system. This is because wealthy individuals and corporations shelter their "income" in a variety of tax havens not available to ordinary citizens. The wealthy also don't pay for their lavish lifestyles based on the income they receive, but on massive bank loans based on the value of their stocks, land and other material holdings. This non-income wealth is not taxed under our current system. This results in the mega-wealthy literally paying no Federal income tax, while the middle class and the poor who have no choice but to live on their incomes unfairly carrying the nation's tax burden.

There are a number of proposals for a more just tax system. These vary from taxing consumption, to a wealth tax that would require the rich to pay a small percentage on their accumulated wealth above certain amounts. Another concept

being discussed involves taxing financial transactions as wealthy individuals and corporations move their wealth around to get the greatest return.

IF America does NOT find a way to create a fair tax system that spreads the burden to all classes of Americans, the rich will continue to get richer and the middle class could descend into poverty. This will eventually result in rule by the wealthy and the powerful and the end of the American democratic experiment.

On protecting a woman's RIGHT TO CHOOSE

For the longest time in America, if a woman wanted to end an unwanted pregnancy she needed to seek out medical hacks in back alleys. That all changed with the liberation of women in the 1970's. Women rightly demanded to make their own decisions about their bodies. It has always seemed odd, that the chief opponents of a woman's right to choose are white men.

There has been much said about when the abortion of a fetus is acceptable. Liberals tend to put the right of abortion much later in the gestation term of the unborn fetus. Conservatives tend to put the deadline much sooner or not at all.

The debate about abortion has two main narratives. First, the timing of when an unborn fetus actually becomes a human being. This determination is still a matter of belief, not science.

Some claim the fetus is a human at the point of conception, even though at that point the unborn is basically a clump of cells. Some say a fetus becomes a human when the heart beat

can first be heard. Other say it is later in the pregnancy when the fetus develops its mental awareness of its surroundings.

This debate has no correct answer. Currently, an individual's position on when human life begins is not based on scientific truth, but rather on their personal belief. So, when anyone claims they know when the fetus becomes human, they are expressing their opinion not a scientific fact.

It is interesting that even the most traditional Christian beliefs include the possibility of a soul that is separate from the body. This obviously comes into play at death, when the soul leaves the body.

IF that can happen, why could it not also happen at birth as well. In this narrative the fetus is a developing human body, but is not fully human until the soul enters the body at some point in the pregnancy including at birth.

The second uniquely American narrative of the abortion debate, is the right of women to choose for themselves how their life unfolds. Even though we individuals have a responsibility to those around us, final decisions about one's body and health is one way we express our freedom. For example, we currently have no law that forces a cancer patient into particular treatment. Similarly, there is currently no law that forces a woman to have an abortion.

What conservative men and women seem to saying to the rest of us is that they want all American women to be governed by their beliefs. Some of this fundamentalist Christian thought stems from the fact that abortion is seen by this group as a sin against God. They believe if America allows abortion, we will lose the blessings of God. This is truly a powerful narrative,

but it is a belief that only about 25% of the American population shares. Hardly a majority.

When you look at older generations of evangelistic Christians, like the famous Billy Graham, they were not opposed to a women's right to choose. This obsession with abortion is a fairly recent occurrence on the far right politically. A cause that was found to be a great fund raiser beginning in the 1980's.

However, national polling shows that a majority of Americans believe that abortion must be an option for a women under certain reasonable circumstances.

IF Americans don't establish a woman's right to choose as a fundamental American right once and for all, an oligarchy that is dominated by white male men will make the choice for them.

On Addressing Climate Change

The carbon we emit into our atmosphere from industrial and corporate agriculture waste has become the primary challenge of the 21st century. Never before in the history of humans have we been capable of damaging our environment to the point it can no longer support us. That time unfortunately has arrived.

The impacts of excess carbon in our atmosphere are changing weather patterns and diminishing our food production, water supplies and the habitability of low lying areas on our coasts. Extreme heat in areas around the globe are already making certain areas unlivable.

The transition from an oil based civilization to sustainable methods of generating power and fueling transportation has already begun, but the question remains is whether we will make the needed changes fast enough to stave off the worse impacts of the changing weather and sea rise.

Our permanent glaciers are already melting at an unrepresented rate. The rising of sea levels and more importantly the shifting of currents that bring warm waters to northern nations is at hand. For example, if the Atlantic current shifts southward as a result of an imbalance between fresh water from the melting ice and sea water salt, Europe could experience a new ice age.

This challenge is facing us at the very time that developing nations in the 3rd world are desiring to have the benefits that industrialized developed nations have enjoyed for years. We in the developed world are the largest creators of excess carbon yet we are asking nations that are just entering 21st century industrialization to curtail their activities.

The lowering of carbon emissions will require a fair approach that includes all developed and developing nations. Perhaps developed nations can help developing nations skip over the heavily polluting industrial stage that caused the carbon issue in the first place and go directly to sustainable green solutions.

We have reached the point that climate change is no longer just a threat to some parts of our way of life, but a challenge that could impact us living on the planet at all.

By most experts calculations, it is already too late to stave off the initial impacts of climate change. We are already seeing more violent storms and mega fires in drought stricken areas.

Humans overrunning the carrying capacity of their land and water is not new. There have been catastrophic collapses of advanced civilizations before because their natural environment could no longer support them. However, this time this challenge is not just in one isolated area of the world, but the entire globe. The 8+ billion humans currently alive on the planet are and will be impacted.

We humans need to radically reduce our carbon emissions while preparing for rising heat and sea levels. Currently, 35% of the planet's population live on one of our oceans coasts. Our financial markets are also mostly located in ports adjacent to ocean waters. Smart corporations and government agencies are already re-locating their data to higher elevations or moving it inland.

Even the rich nations that are better protected against the initial changes that climate change is causing could be overrun by migrating populations trying to find a new place to live. This could cause a destabilization of governments and the end of democracies that are not designed to react quickly to overwhelming crisis. Martial law could be evoked if societies descend into chaos resulting in a dark period of rule by the powerful.

If we chose to NOT to address the multiple challenges that climate change presents in time, the on-going stability of the lives of the global human population will be impacted and democracies will fail.

On creating a THIRD POLITICAL PARTY

Initially, our founders did not address political parties, even though George Washington warned political parties could result in a polarization of the electorate.

Regardless, America quickly split into two political factions with conservative and liberal views. Historically, conservatives tended to want to reduce the power of the central Federal government, giving it instead to the states. Liberals tended to argue for more national Federal government that would ensure democratic norms were evenly enforced across all states.

Ultimately, this difference of opinion resulted in the American civil war, when the southern states demanded that they be allowed to have slaves and the northern states insisted that the institution of slavery was un-American.

Ultimately the union was persevered and slavery was abolished, but later in the 1960's the Federal government had to step in again to ensure voting rights for people of color. Given the Trumpkins current attempt to suppress voters of color and the support they are receiving from a very conservative Supreme Court we need to enforce simple voter rights at the federal level.

The two political parties have changed names and politics over the years, but the main stream of American politics has always been dominated by just two political parties. While there have always been other parties, they have been relegated to insignificance by the domination of the two party machinery and legal standing in the 50 states. This has

resulted in third parties being on the national ballot, but not gaining prominence.

One historical result of the American two party system is that power tended to vacillate between the moderates of both parties, while both had more extreme factions. Currently, we are faced with a different situation. The rise of social media has boosted what were extremist positions into the mainstream debate. The result is a growing polarization that has partially paralyzed us from addressing the considerable challenges we face. One party is so terrified they will lose power, they are attempting to deny people of color a chance to easily vote. And the other does not really listen to the 45% of citizens that did not vote for them.

IF America continues to be polarized, those of us moderates on both sides of the aisle and independents may want to consider forming a third political force that represents a majority of Americans that are interested in pursuing common sense solutions.

On reforming law ENFORCEMENT

The polarization of American culture has resulted in a great deal of civil unrest. Mass shootings of civilians and violent protest demonstrations have become common place. One result of this is our civil law enforcement have become more and more militarized.

Initially the rise of well-armed drug gangs in the 1980's prompted police departments across the country to increase their level of weaponization to match the fire power of these bands of law breakers. This "upgrade" included full body, armor, automatic weapons, and urban assault vehicles. It was

sometimes hard to tell the difference between active military troops and civil police forces.

It has gotten to the point that routine traffic stops are made by civil police in full riot gear. This has been one factor in the rise of police shootings of people of color. Civil police units were originally intended to “serve and protect” their communities not act as enforcers of martial law.

A related issue of our “policing” problem in the United States is we currently have the highest number of incarcerated individuals worldwide, with more than 2.12 million people in prison. The U.S. is followed by China, Brazil, the Russian Federation, and India.

The rise of heavily armed white supremacist militias in certain states is also of concern. If heavily armed black individuals had paraded themselves in state capitals like the white militias have been allowed to do, they would have been arrested or worse. If the insurrectionists that stormed the US Capitol building on January 6th had been people of color rather than primarily white, they would have been shot before they entered the building. This disparity between white and black justice is on display for all to see.

One of the excesses of the Trump administration was to form heavily armed units in a variety of agencies like immigration, prisons, the DEA and Homeland Security. This resulted in mysterious secret “police” units showing up at Black Lives Matter protests pulling protestors into unmarked mini-vans. Trump also had to be curtailed from ordering the military to shoot protestors. This would have been a violation of every democratic norm we hold dear.

IF America does not reform its civil police forces so they return to serving and protecting their communities, and leave riot suppression to national guard units, citizens trust of their civil police will continue to dangerously erode.

On a fair and reasonable system of IMMIGRATION

America is an interesting paradox. On the one hand we are a nation of immigrants, yet we have always distrusted and persecuted new comers who arrived on our shores before they became assimilated into our culture.

The current situation involving central American immigrants is nothing new. America has always discriminated against the next group to arrive. And the notion that this situation is going away anytime soon is a fantasy. For example, one of the biggest challenges of climate change is that it is already causing migrations of populations looking to escape rising ocean waters and the extreme heat.

We find ourselves in need of a fair and reasonable path to citizenship for all who desire it, yet administration after administration on both sides of the aisle have not figured out a way to allow immigrants to come to this country, while protecting our existing social systems from being overwhelmed.

The first thing that needs in to happen in our view is that full citizenship needs to be given to the 11 million undocumented aliens that have lived in the United States for years paying taxes. Those wanting to come now from other countries also need a system that fairly identifies those that are legitimate immigrants running from persecution in their home countries

from foreign gang members and drug lords looking to expand their darkness into American cities and towns.

IF we do not establish a fair immigration pathway that does not overwhelm our existing social services programs, the problem will only get worse as immigrants multiply because of climate change and the continuing collateral damage of civil wars in their home countries. While progressives scoffed at Trumps great southern wall, if the situation gets worse, we may have to consider closing our borders. That would be against everything we stand for as a democracy.

On GUN regulation

America has always had a unique relationship with guns compared with other countries in the developed world. Currently the US has 393 million guns registered. That is about 46 percent of the world's total weapon registrations.

In the days of our initial revolution, the small American standing army was assisted by state militias. That is why the second amendment of the constitution protects civilians rights to form state militias in defense of our country.

Unfortunately, those that support unlimited gun ownership, including military assault weapons, have distorted this original constitutional intent to apply to all individuals right to defend themselves with military arms. Our founders never intended this.

While the majority of gun owners act responsibly, there is a growing fringe element that wants to organize heavily armed private militias that are independent of our law enforcement system. Organizations like the National Rifle Association

(NRA) also exploit the fears of these citizens suggesting the “government” wants to take all their guns away. All with the aim to raise more money to enrich themselves. Nothing could be further from the truth, but it is a great fund raising pitch.

America is in the middle of an epidemic of violence. Not a week goes by that a mass shooting of innocence civilians, including school children, does not take place. We also have armed white militias threatening lawfully elected officials with kidnaping or death if they attempt address our growing gun violence problem.

No one of sound mind is suggesting that ALL guns be confiscated by the government. What is being suggested is that we do more extensive background checks, limit the types of assault weapons that can be owned by civilians and close the legal loop holes that allow gun dealers to circumvent gun ownership laws. We also need to expose organizations like the NRA that are using the gun issue misinformation as a fund raising tool.

IF we don't develop a sane approach to gun ownership, the violence will continue to escalate. Law enforcement will have to use increasingly draconian measures to ensure the safety of citizens at schools, malls and public places. In a sense, America would become an armed camp.

On creating ECONOMIC ZONES of opportunity

In theory America offers economic opportunity to all its citizens, yet many people of color are still not afforded these opportunities. There has been a systemic attempt by the white male power structure to limit the economic power of people of color.

A concept that is being discussed is developing “economic zones of opportunity” in poorer communities. These zones would provide funding and training for minority owned business ventures that would theoretically raise all boats in poorer communities. This concept is not without complexity, but the notion of teaching people to fish for themselves rather than simply providing handouts, has a better track record for long term change.

IF America does not address the growing level of poverty in this country and mitigate the financial injustice that has been present for years, the result will continue to be more civil unrest. A democracy cannot thrive unless its entire population has the opportunity to improve themselves.

On creating OCEAN re-generation zones

96% of planet Earth is ocean. It is after all a “water” planet. Over the millennia our oceans have seemed never ending. The notion that we humans could actually damage the bounty our ocean systems provided was laughable.

However, like many things in the natural world of the 21st century we are currently doing irreparable damage to our oceans and the life that lives there. Corporate trawler fleets from many nations continue to vacuum up sea life in large swatches of our fishing grounds. This practice is unsustainable.

Throughout history the oceans have provided life giving food for those who lived on or near the shore. It does not seem possible that we have already consumed 90% of the big fish,

and what we are currently fighting over in fishing grounds all over the world is the remaining 10%.

Our carbon admissions are also raising the temperature of the ocean water. This changes everything about how our ocean ecosystems function. The rising of the temperature and the acidity as well, is already having an impact.

Almost comical (if it weren't so tragic) is that we have dumped our garbage into the oceans for so long that lately we have created mile wide floating piles of discarded plastic that ensnare ocean life and become their own distorted eco-system.

Ocean protection, like climate change, is tough for us to grasp. The vastness of our oceans is mostly out of our sight. Nations have put "coastal" waters under their protection, but these zones don't include fishing grounds that are outside this protection. When you look at an area that has been scrapped by mile wide corporate trawler fishing nets, it looks like a bleak lunar landscape. Once deadened like this, it cannot regenerate for generations, if ever.

One ray of hope that is being explored is the establishment of protected ocean re-generation zones. Scientists have identified 12 zones around the world where sea life is being birthed. By protecting these re-generation zones while allowing private fisherman to take their catch from the outside boundaries of the zones, the core ocean stock is protected and able to keep reproducing.

IF we don't begin changing our behavior towards our oceans, the present deteriorating conditions will have an impact on the overall livability of the planet for all humans

On public and private SPACE exploration and colonization

For the longest time, travel to the moon, the asteroids and other planets had been the stuff of science fiction. No more. Both nations and private corporations are creating space vehicles that will take humans into orbit and then to the Moon, Mars and beyond.

The private corporate space travel capability is being developed by companies funded by tech billionaires. Elon Musk's founding of SpaceX, and the creation of Blue Origin by Jeff Bezos are two examples. In some ways these private ventures are surpassing the efforts of government space programs. They employ the latest tech innovations to get humans and cargo to the International Space Station and currently are planning on landing on the moon next.

The trajectory of this evolution has developed slowly, but steadily. Lately, it has accelerated as Bezos and Musk are also launching networks of small communication satellites to power an Internet system from space. These networks will have a big impact in the third world where land based systems are not available.

One current issue of our growing space exploration is the lack of coordination between governments and private corporations. For example, there is already a great deal of "space junk" that has accumulated over the years in orbit. These massive launches of new satellites is only going to make it worse. Minuscule pieces of this space junk can take out a space station or a shuttle.

What happens when China or SpaceX land on the moon? Will they claim it for their people or their corporation. The history

of corporations colonizing new territories on Earth is not a pleasant one.

IF we don't develop a coordinated approach to space exploration we could export our competitive and warring nature out into the galaxy. We have a chance to take a step together as Earthers as we venture out into space.

Together we could create and distribute the benefits of space exploration to all humankind. Otherwise, we may end up with corporations controlling our space colonies like we see in many of our dystopian films and video games.

On the SEPARATION of church and state

When America first declared its independence, one of the changes the colonists made was to establish a clear dividing line between church and state. Monarchies like the one in England merged the church and the state, each supporting the power of the other. This resulted in terrible inquisitions that were carried out for purely political reasons. Thousands were brutally tortured and killed. Not exactly what Jesus would do.

America was colonized by individuals who in many cases were running from the distorted authority of the Church of England or the Catholic Church. When the American revolution emerged, the founders were very clear. There would be no "state" church. At the time of the American revolution the majority of Americans were agnostic, not members of any particular faith as much as Christian leaders over the years would have you believe otherwise.

Over the years the separation of church and state in the US has become less clear. A variety of fundamentalist Christian Churches have established themselves in political circles.

Although America allowed for religious freedom and the practice of many faiths, fundamentalist Christianity has become a powerful political influence in many communities. This was reflected when we actually added "under god" to the pledge of allegiance in June of 1954.

The white male power structure has relied on fundamentalist Christian faith organizations to provide them legitimacy. In a sense it harkens back to the relationship of church and state in monarchies. For example, the rise of the evangelical movement in the 1970's created a political power block that was actively involved in opposing a woman's right to choose, gay marriage and equal rights for women.

***IF** we allow religion, particularly one religion like fundamentalist Christianity, to creep back into our political affairs, an important tenet of American democracy will be impacted. Americans are free to worship or not. Religious organizations are not supposed to get politically involved to the point that they are influencing national policy. This separation of church and state is a fundamental American principle that must be protected.*

Our Calling

This is not the first time we Americans have needed to stand up against the rich and powerful. The majority of American's seek COMMON SENSE solutions to the considerable challenges we face. These solutions need to include the best of conservative and liberal viewpoints.

IF we don't take a stand, America will continue to slide into an oligarchy governed by the powerful.

NOW is the time for all good citizens to come to the aid of our nation.

