

Chapter 26 — The Roller Coaster

The Ugly Truth, How Does It Work?, The Puppet Show, How Did We Get Here?, Get Local, The Lemmings, Facing Change

The Ugly Truth

Of one thing we can be sure: the government is not going to save this planet. The past 50 years of a completely erroneous roller-coaster ride should tell us that. There's always something more important to argue about, and the environment falls by the wayside, with only a few exceptions. Currently our most urgent problem appears to be fascism in our government, and a bunch of spineless pimps who are more concerned about keeping their jobs than about the needs of the people, which in turn are linked at the hip to the needs of the planet. This is why it's up to each and every one of us to look in the mirror and figure out what we can do. Most successes happen from the grassroots up anyway. We have to insist, we have to advocate, and we have to figure out how to live our lives such that we give as little money as possible to the greedy scumbags who are controlling our leaders like puppets and running wild over our country and ruining our environment.

The Environment should be the most nonpolitical issue we have. Why would I say that? I mean, of course it's political. Everything's political. Greens lean left and non-greens lean right. Right? To me, this makes no sense. It's been this way for decades, since we began to recognize that our wonderful life wasn't so wonderful for the planet. Or at least, since some of us began to recognize that we might have a problem. That we might have a problem with running out of resources someday, that we might overrun wildlife and drive species to extinction, that we might leave a dry, barren rock for future generations to try and scrape out a living. That we need to change how we do things, sooner rather than later, with urgency, to avoid a complete disaster. You'd think our leaders could agree on this one issue since we all share this planet, for good or bad, and each and every one of us, no matter what core philosophies guide how we view our lives and our world. You'd think we could agree on saving our world.

So, why is that? Why is it that generally left-leaning types seem to support the environment, with responsible businesses, responsible behavior, and so on, while right-leaning types mostly disregard the environment as something not worth their trouble? Or a hoax? A conspiracy theory? And this generalization is not even completely aligned. I know plenty of right-leaning people who do seem to care, at least to a point. People who recycle diligently, who have two or fewer children, who keep their carbon footprint low. But the thing that truly fascinates me is that, while the right thinks they are supporting total freedom without government intervention, that is not what is actually happening in a right-wing government. For one thing, why is it so important to the right to fight so hard against any attempts to stop our uncontrolled population growth? And doing that by making abortion illegal, for example? How is it that telling women whether or not to have children is complete freedom from government interference? When that's the most personal and private decision a woman can make? How is a personal decision like that any business whatsoever of the government?

It's interesting to me that, when I ask my right-leaning friends to explain why their party is so against population control, the answer I mainly seem to get is around religion. Which doesn't make sense either, since our country's constitution, from the beginning, held "separation of church and state" as a guiding principle underlying the First Amendment.¹ So religion should have nothing to do with it. And I know just as many people who are religious and right-leaning, or religious and left-leaning. Even if it were OK to bring religion into politics, Pope Francis himself said, "But we don't need to breed like rabbits."² And Joe Biden, a Catholic, fully supported a woman's right to choose, while Trump, probably the most non-religious, diabolical human on the planet, is arguably responsible for removing a woman's right to choose in our country by manipulating our Supreme Court.

So even if religion played into politics in the U.S., it still doesn't make sense that it would drive resistance to controlling our population. Particularly if it means saving or losing the very planet that we live on. Go figure.

Population is a great example of how we are losing our freedoms. Insidiously, one by one. Without even realizing it. The right is fighting to minimize government and keep our freedoms while supporting a government that resists population control. Aggressively. By restricting women's rights to make decisions about their own families and their own bodies. Does that sound like freedom? Hmm. And ever-increasing population growth is restricting our personal freedoms, literally with each additional person we add to this planet and to our own country. We have less available water and less access to public lands, and we put up with constant construction to accommodate the growing population. We spew more CO₂e and warm our planet faster while running through what's left of fossil fuels faster than ever. We constantly take more land from wildlife when there's almost none left. And at the bottom of every environmental problem we have is unrestrained population growth.

"Politics is the entertainment division of the military-industrial complex."

Frank Zappa

You can't talk about an environmental problem without eventually getting to population and social issues. In fact, many of our social problems are really problems of scarcity, climate, and weather, which are in turn driven by population growth. After all, people get angry when they can't get enough food and water for their families, much less shelter and other comforts. Wouldn't you? I sure would. It shouldn't be a complete shock to think that much of the recent global unrest these days, the terrorism, the genocides, the civil wars, the migrations, involve at their core people fighting over resources. So, you'd think it would make all the sense in the world no matter what side of the aisle you're on here in the U.S. to always support efforts to control our population. And you'd think in this state of emergency we've created on our planet by allowing our population to get too big that population would be the ultimate bipartisan issue. So why isn't it?

You'd think that stopping our wildlife destruction would be high on the list too, given that if the intricate natural cycle of life on this planet is destroyed completely, we'll definitely lose our planet. You'd think that clean air and water for all would be priorities, that stopping pollution of our life-giving air, water and land would be of utmost priority. And it is—when progressives are in charge, and it drops to the bottom of the list as soon as conservatives are in charge. The right is aggressive about it, making sure to tear apart any gains made by the left when they were in charge. And that is who we've become as a country. Vindictive rights trashing any successes from the left.

When conservatives claim that they are removing restrictions to freedom by abolishing environmental regulations that protect our land, water, air, and biodiversity for all of us in order to help big corporations save money, while restricting the most basic freedom, a woman's right to choose for herself whether or not to have a child, doesn't that seem a bit hypocritical? Think about that. Think about who is free and who is not under this kind of governance. It looks to me like the "freedom" is intended for the extremely wealthy "privileged" and not actually for the rest of us.

So, what's a confused, overwhelmed citizen to do? For one thing, if you care about the future and our democracy, at least try and get informed by paying attention to actual ethical news that can be fact-checked and verified and not propaganda and lies designed to brainwash starry-eyed followers of some obsolete reality show host into making bad, uninformed, voting decisions that make things worse. The Republicans didn't used to do this, but the party has become extremely corrupt and can no longer be trusted to support their constituents or even to tell the truth, much less take steps to help our planet. They have proven time

"As long as I live, I don't think I'll get over this pure, dumb fact: Trump told his fans he had to blow up the liberal order because it was the only way to secure the very benefits the liberal order was already bringing us. This reminds me (sic) of Aesop's fable about the greedy farmer who butchered the goose that laid golden eggs." Andrew Egger, The Bulwark, 1/21/26

and again that they're here strictly for the wealthy and themselves, and not to serve democracy. The U.S. Congress took 34 years to finally get around to passing a significant piece of climate legislation after Jim Hansen first testified before the Senate in 1988 that climate change was real and dangerous. This was the Inflation Reduction Act passed by Biden, that Trump began trashing the minute he got into office, the latest example of conservatives undoing any progressive efforts to mitigate our destruction of our world.

My suggestion is to only vote for leaders who support efforts to protect our environment and control our population growth. It doesn't matter what side of the aisle they're on; check out their agenda on the internet, check how they've voted in the past and what they say they're going to support in the future, and then decide who to vote for.

How Does It Work?

The original vision of our insanely courageous founding fathers, who risked their lives to establish our democracy and get us out from under the thumb of an oppressive king, established a balance of power to prevent a dictator (or king) from ever taking over our government. They established three specific arms of government designed to truly represent the will of the citizens who, in a democracy, run the government through leadership and representatives voted in by the people. These branches, the executive, legislative, and judicial, were set up to balance with different views of the people as to priorities and how the government should be administered. And it's worked all this time, for the past 250 years, sort of. We've had our share of problems, usually involving greedy white supremacists who feel like they have the right to determine the country's rules in their favor, and we've ended up sending our promising youth to unnecessary wars because of them. We've also had leaders that were actually in it for the right reasons, to represent the people. There are many ethical leaders out there now who still care about the people, democracy, and the planet, mainly Democrats, with a smattering of rare ethical Republicans in the mix.

Unfortunately, the majority of Republicans in the legislative, executive, and judicial branches are currently doubling down on their support of extreme far-right fascism. They are supporting the most corrupt, greedy, demented president in history, whose policies are so horrible that nobody in their right mind, even a dyed-in-the wool

"Our country is sleep-walking into a dictatorship." Liz Cheney (R), 2020

Republican, would be likely to vote for him if they understood his policies. However, they did vote for him, because they didn't understand his policies. They voted for him because he lied, knowing that if he were truthful only a handful of completely dumbed-down morons and hard-core white supremacists would vote for him. And it's utterly disgraceful that so many bought his hogwash. His base was basically brainwashed by several unethical media outlets bankrolled by ultra-wealthy slimebags, most notably Fox News, that support fascism, oligarchy, and white supremacy. Unfortunately, none of this kind of agenda has anything to do with the will of the people or environmental responsibility. This means that our federal government is unlikely to get back on track when it comes to progress towards saving our planet any time soon.

The box shows some different forms of government and political philosophies that are pertinent to the government in our country. Democracy is the form of government that our forefathers established, run by and for the people, the government where each and every citizen of voting age has a vote and a voice in how our country is run. Between the World War I and 1981, when Ronald Reagan (a popular actor) was elected, we managed to mainly retain a fairly true-to-form democracy in which two main philosophies, liberalism and conservatism, negotiated policies and issues in a reasonably balanced and civilized manner, through compromises as needed to keep the government moving in a direction that represented the people.

"American democracy has been hacked, and the hack is campaign finance." Al Gore (D)

During this period, we saw a gradual increase in extreme wealth but didn't really pay too much attention because the middle class was mainly content, so it wasn't seen as a pressing problem. Also, campaign donations became an unlimited free-for-all in which the wealthy and big corporations could donate big (actually bribe or pay off) to political campaigns so that they could always be favored when it came to legislation meant to keep them in check. This meant that they could pollute, poison, and swindle customers as much as they wanted and get away with it, for the most part.

Democracy — A form of government run by the citizens, who elect preferred representatives in free and fair elections.

Oligarchy — A form of government in which power rests with a small number of people. Leaders of such regimes are often referred to as oligarchs and generally are characterized by having titles of nobility or high amounts of wealth.³

Liberalism —

1. Willingness to respect or accept behavior or opinions different from one's own; openness to new ideas.

2. A political and social philosophy that promotes individual rights, civil liberties, democracy, and free enterprise.⁴

Conservatism — A political philosophy that emphasizes the importance of tradition, social order, and limited government intervention in the affairs of individuals and society.⁵

Neoliberalism — A political approach that favors free-market capitalism, deregulation, and reduction in government spending.⁶

Socialism — An economic and political philosophy encompassing diverse economic and social systems characterized by social ownership of the means of production, as opposed to private ownership.⁷

Communism — Entails the absence of private property and social classes, and ultimately money and the state.⁸

Fascism — A far-right, authoritarian, and ultranationalist political ideology and movement that rose to prominence in early-20th-century Europe. Fascism is characterized by support for a dictatorial leader, centralized autocracy, militarism, forcible suppression of opposition, belief in a natural social hierarchy, subordination of individual interests for the perceived interest of the nation or race, and strong regimentation of society and the economy.⁹

Dictatorship — A form of government which is characterized by a leader who holds absolute or near-absolute political power. Politics in a dictatorship are controlled by a dictator, and they are facilitated through an inner circle of elites that includes advisers, generals, and other high-ranking officials. The dictator maintains control by influencing and appeasing the inner circle and repressing any opposition, which may include rival political parties, armed resistance, or disloyal members of the dictator's inner circle.¹⁰

The unlimited campaign donations have transitioned our original democracy over time into an oligarchy in which the wealthy call the shots through their bought-and-paid-for representatives in the ultimate corruption. So it's no wonder that the middle class is collapsing, the top-to-bottom ratio is one of the largest in the world, and the environment is being largely ignored as the wealthy exploit it to their whims. In the past 40 years, trillions of dollars of wealth have been transferred from the lower and middle classes to the top 1 percent, and even to the top 0.1 percent.

While the Democratic Party and associated liberalism ideology hasn't really changed much, the Republican Party has changed completely. They've changed from a conservative and neoliberal ideology, in which government is minimized and everyone from the people to corporations can run in an unregulated market. Now, they are removing regulations and tax obligations from some, but not all, of the people. They are favoring the wealthy while interfering with women's right to choose, and they are terrorizing, threatening, and vindictively enacting revenge on states, cities, and American citizens who disagree with their policies. Or more accurately, with the president's policies. American citizens who have done nothing wrong or illegal, save possibly standing up for their rights, are literally getting dragged into the streets in the middle of the night and harassed without due cause in order to scare the rest of us into submission. An unarmed woman was shot in the face, murdered by a federal agent without cause, and died because medical help was obstructed by the same federal agent. I don't know about you, but this sounds a bit like oppression of citizens to me.



Looking at the definitions in the box above, the definitions that now most closely fit the former Republican Party would be fascism and dictatorship. Fascism takes us backwards to Nazi Germany and communist Russia, the horrors of which we now face in our own country, thanks to ignorant voters who willingly voted for Trump. This is basically what happened in Germany, when voters who weren't paying attention voted for Hitler. All I can say is, good job, fools. And, seeing it coming, I actually tried to warn friends and family about the impending disaster by quoting on Face Book actual, ethical Republican leaders who were warning against voting for Trump. And I got mainly told to piss off, accused of blasphemy, and told I was a mean, nasty lib. Which was interesting and mind-boggling, since people who know me well know that I never lie and have never spoken out about politics. Which would mean that I'm really horrified if I find it necessary to speak up. I mean, that's some serious brainwashing we're talking about. And here we are.

"The greatest danger to republics and the liberties of the people comes from political opportunists who began as demagogues and end as tyrants, and the people who follow them." Alexander Hamilton in the Federalist Papers, 1787

In our country we now have the Democratic Party and the Fascist Party. There's a thin line between fascism and dictatorship, and actually I think we're in more of a dictatorship, given all the oligarchs that surround Trump. Either way, we're definitely not free anymore. The people are no longer running the country. I'm not saying we were truly free before Trump took over. I mean, are we truly free if we're constantly manipulated into spending our hard-earned dollars to maintain impossible, perpetual economic growth and destroy our planet? The reality is that when wealth is concentrated in the hands of a few, the inequality creates a market for political influence, and that corrupts democracy.

There are other forms of government that have been historically held up as "not free," which is definitely true of communism, in which the state owns everything and pretty much regulates the finest details of people's lives, including whether they are allowed to travel outside the country. Or have babies. Another is socialism, something in between democracy and communism, in which individual freedoms are intact, but the state owns and runs most of the common services, like education and health care. This isn't really bad, and is in place in many countries that have decent happy indexes that are higher than the U.S. I know my share of Canadians who live in a socialist government, and they tell me that it's fine, and probably less expensive to pay higher taxes and let the state run the services. They get free health care and free education all the way through college, obviously paid for with tax dollars, but these are available to all citizens. In the U.S. under democracy, we have to pay our way for the

most part, and we have people who die because they can't afford some huge medical bill and students who can't pay off their student loans because of the financial hardship.

Within the federal government, we have our states, and then we have counties, cities, and towns within the states, each with their own governance that aligns with and reports to the next level. At the state and city levels the governments are closer to the people. When it comes to environmental regulation and women's right to choose, some states are more progressive than others. States are required to meet federal environmental regulations, but they are allowed to make regulations stricter than federal regulations, and they often do. Certain states and cities have demonstrated more consistent proactivity than the federal government on trying to steer us away from fossil fuel and towards a more sustainable future, which is a good thing; otherwise, we'd be in worse shape than we are at this point.

The Puppet Show

The information in the box clearly shows a trend when it comes to environmental voting. By the way, you can easily look up your senators and representatives to see where they stand on the League of Conservation Voters Congressional Voting Record website.¹¹ It's pretty clear that if your representatives are Democrats, they are very likely to favor the environment in their voting, while if they're Republicans, not so much.

Average of lifetime voting records for current U.S. senators in favor of environmental regulations:

Democrats: 95%

Republicans: 8%

Independents: 79%

In Wyoming, energy corporations suppress information, science, and news that may interfere with producing as much fossil fuel as possible. One example is the Casper Museum, which cancelled an exhibit when its oil-rich benefactors threatened to cut funding. Another is coal money that threatened to cut funding to the University of Wyoming if it didn't remove an artwork display that referenced global warming.¹² It appears that when unethical industries provide any kind of supposedly generous funding, the true purpose is to control the information that the public sees, because it puts them in a position to withdraw funding and force either a lack of information or misinformation. Think about that the next time you see big corp kindly funding this or that. They're not being kind and generous. They're being manipulative.

Since 2005, the fossil-fuel industry has spent \$1.7 billion in the U.S. on lobbying and campaign donations, so it's no wonder they tend to get their way.¹³ With all those handouts, it's no wonder that our elected officials cater to big oil rather than their constituents. This also explains why known toxic petrochemicals like Styrofoam and Roundup are still legal, and why most people don't understand the damage they do. And why solar and wind energy in the U.S. is still at a measly 11% of total national energy when the Germans are at 47%. Senator Rand Paul (R) actually tried to force the U.S. Postal Service to auction off its entire electric fleet, some 7,200 trucks and charging stations, under big oil's thumb. He tried to pitch it as saving, but it would actually waste \$1.6 billion of taxpayer dollars. How corrupt is that?

Under Trump, the EPA isn't implementing much-needed stronger regulations to control wastewater discharge from meat and poultry processing facilities because industry stakeholders whined about the costs. Even though we're losing our entire ecosystem because of it. And Iowa, which already has the worst water quality and drinking water polluted by fertilizer and manure, continues to pollute thanks to resistance from the Iowa Farm Bureau Federation, which pays off the politicians. This is why we need to make responsible consumer choices, which means organic produce and certified responsible meat.

"The authors of Project 2025 claim that those working to address climate change are part of 'the 'climate change alarm industry,' which is 'harmful to future U.S. prosperity.'"¹⁴

How Did We Get Here?

During all this time, we have been gradually moving from a true democracy to an oligarchy, in which wealthy individuals actually rule the country and the politicians who were voted for by the people are actually puppets who are bought and paid for by the wealthy.

Since Reagan was elected in 1981, Republicans have stubbornly held onto his “trickle-down economics” policies, even though they don’t work and never did. The idea that letting the wealthy run free and unregulated so they can make bank and then all that money would somehow trickle down to the lower-income classes turns out to be a complete failure. The past 40 years have proven that what really happens when you let rich people run unregulated is that they just keep their money and spend it on extravagances that increase their carbon footprint, as seen in chapter 25. Democrats have been fighting this ever since, and since Reagan, trillions of dollars have moved from the working class level of the economy to the top 1%, creating a gigantic top/bottom ratio. Now our country is divided into the Democrats and liberal-leaning factions who completely understand this, and the Republicans and conservative-leaning factions who either stubbornly choose to ignore historical facts or simply aren’t intelligent enough to get it. Democrats work to help the working class, and Republicans work to help the rich, swinging our economics from one side to the other every time the administration changes. And our environmental practices along with it.

When Bush was elected in 2001, the second thing he did, after removing family planning funding for undeveloped countries, was to remove renewable energy subsidies, saying these industries had to stand on their own, while continuing to subsidize oil and gas. Al Gore’s 2006 documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*, brought the environmental crisis into the main stream, where it began to get a little attention in the media, but also turned it into a political partisan issue, creating the concept of the “green liberal” that’s stuck to this day. I wonder if, in addition to the perception, the simple fact is that environmental responsibility flies in the face of sheer uncontrolled greed because responsibility is better for the people, while greed benefits only a few.

“The American way of life is not negotiable.”

Dick Cheney (R)

The past two Democratic Presidents, Obama and Biden, were actually in it for the right reasons, to serve the people, and did their best to steer us back towards a true democracy and a more equitable income ratio. They actually did a remarkable job, considering the obstinance and petulance they faced in the legislative and judicial branches, which were both loaded with extremists who were voted in by brainwashed citizens who believed the vitriolic, hateful advertisements that were paid for by extremely wealthy, unethical individuals and corporations that sought to maintain us all on a path to destruction.

Now we have the Republicans actively dismissing science, calling out global warming as a hoax, and spreading as much disinformation as possible, funded by big oil. Republicans are attacking women’s rights, diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, immigration, LGBTQ rights and every environmental policy ever put in place, mainly through the will of the people. Does that feel like we’re gaining rights and freedom or losing them? Hello?

And we had Democrats led by Biden emphasizing the reality of climate change and the absolute necessity of mitigation. Biden, who actually paid attention to climate information, such as the National Climate Assessment, stated that “This assessment shows us in clear scientific terms that climate change is impacting all regions, all sectors of the United States, not just some, all.” He followed that with nearly \$6 billion in funding to foster climate resilience in the U.S. in 2023. We had a truly intelligent and proactive President and we let him go in favor of a clueless thug.

In December of 2023, on the anniversary of the Endangered Species Act, Biden urged Americans to protect ecosystems and biodiversity. He asked that we “honor all the progress we have made toward protecting endangered species, and come together to conserve our planet.” In the face of a Republican anti-environmental

Congress, his administration managed to invest billions of dollars in forest management, ecosystem restoration, and protection of watersheds, as well as making historic investments in addressing climate change. As president, he protected more U.S. lands and waters than any president since John F. Kennedy.¹⁵ He also protected huge amounts of coastal waters from future oil and gas leasing. The Trump administration vowed to drill, baby, drill, once they were in charge.

The Republicans are currently undergoing a major effort to privatize as much public lands as possible, selling it to large corporations so they can trash and exploit it at their whim. And they stand to gain major profits as they destroy the last of the scraps of land in this country that were available to wildlife. Trump has promised companies that invest a billion or more dollars in the U.S. that they will get expedited approvals and permits, including those covering environmental concerns. This is mainly to encourage data centers, which are extremely high energy users and will increase demand on fossil fuels.

And to make things completely incomprehensible, our current president lies through his teeth about the success of his policies, and his followers actually believe him. When so many people don't understand what's going on right now, it's really scary. And sad. Biden inherited an economic mess after Trump's horrendous first term whose policies were an economic disaster that was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Biden managed to get a lot of progressive policies in place, in the face of hard-right resistance, in a short four years. Our economy was literally the best in the world, and ignorant Trump followers who get their information from Fox News and other biased right-wing media actually believed Trump's nonsense that the economy was horrible. Basically the right-wing media lied to their base because the truth wouldn't get Trump elected. And it worked.

You have to ask, if a party has to lie to get their candidate elected, how can that party be relevant? It turns out they're a bunch of crooks. And they're relevant only because a bunch of irresponsible voters stubbornly voted their party line without understanding the consequences. Which may well be loss of our democracy to fascism. Either that, or they voted for fascism on purpose. In Minnesota, federal ICE agents are literally murdering people without cause, and the reason this state is getting picked on is because the governor, Tim Walz, ran against Trump in the election and is a Democrat who disagrees with his policies. I'll bet you can't wait until ICE hits your state. Or are you even paying attention to what's happening?

In his 1951 *The True Believer: Notes on the Nature of Mass Movements*, philosopher Eric Hoffer noted that once people are wedded to a strongman, they will cling to him ever more tightly as his behavior becomes more and more erratic. This loyalty is in part to demonstrate their own devotion to the cause, and in part to justify their own attacks on those the strongman has given them permission to hurt.¹⁶

Now here we are, stuck with a severe budget deficit that is the direct result of Republicans refusing to tax the wealthy their fair share. Biden's solution was to let tax cuts on incomes of more than \$400,000/year expire, and leave the rest in place. This would have balanced the budget just fine, while reducing the top/bottom ratio of earnings and helping the environment a lot, because the wealthy would have that much less to squander. Now Trump's administration is investigating reducing Social Security and Medicare to make up the deficit. I mean, seriously? Losing the revenue part of the budget equation and focusing only on spending cuts is basically a repeat of what the greedy late-19th-century industrialists embraced, in which a few wealthy leaders got to decide how to direct the nation's wealth. Did we not learn from that?

Rather than free Americans with a voice in our government, we're now more like a flock of sheep following whatever shepherd is in charge at the time until it's time for slaughter. Or until the grass runs out. Whichever comes first.

Get Local

Since the states can pass stricter regulations than the federal government, some states may be able to do some good in the face of a fascist federal administration. However, in fascism, our current federal administration tends to take revenge on states that disagree with federal policies, commonly by refusing to fund state programs. Despite that issue, there are a lot of state governors and local city governments trying to take action on the environment, and there may be some hope here. As I mentioned before, I think true change is more likely from the local grass-roots level, where citizens are more connected to their representatives.

As of 2024, 33 U.S. states have or are developing a climate action plan, and 23 states plus Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico have official goals to reach 100% clean energy between 2030 and 2050. Eight states and dozens of municipalities and Tribal Nations have filed lawsuits against fossil fuel companies for downplaying their role in causing climate change and for knowingly deceiving the public. Montana, Pennsylvania, and New York have adopted green amendments to their state constitutions, establishing fundamental rights to clean air, water, and soil, including a stable climate. An additional 15 states are considering joining them.¹⁷

There are plenty of actions that states can do and are doing to speed up the path to zero energy that don't actually require significant funding. Some great examples are Utah, of all states, which actually became the first in the country to not require permits or fees for balcony solar, which is one of the most flexible and impactful options for renters. Pretty progressive for such a conservative state if you ask me, and says a lot for the urgency of our situation. In 2024, Massachusetts passed some siting and permitting reform laws that will make it easier to build new community solar farms. California and Maryland have passed laws that require the use of free software developed by the federal renewable research lab that streamlines approvals for solar panels, batteries, and heat pumps.¹⁸ When the software was used in Tucson, Arizona, the rate of solar installations doubled.

Plastic bags are being banned at the state level in several states. In coastal states, a study found that when plastic bags are banned at the state and local levels, it reduced plastic bag waste by 25–47%.¹⁹ In California, they are enacting policies to prevent microplastics from entering the Pacific Ocean, including disincentivizing or banning plastic that's not recyclable, such as Styrofoam, as well as requiring food service businesses to only provide compostable containers on demand. They'll also be modifying wastewater resource recovery facilities and retrofitting stormwater facilities to minimize microplastic pass-through.²⁰

In Colorado, where I live, the state implemented wetlands protection that replaced the regulations the federal government eliminated during the second Trump administration, becoming the first state in the country to do so. In Golden, the city where I live, we have a city sustainability program with a manager and staff, as well as a Citizen's Sustainability Advisory Board that helps the city set policy to meet the Paris Treaty zero energy and zero waste goals. A citizen's non-profit organization, Sustainable Golden, has also been formed to help the city reach the goals faster by providing more volunteers. Golden is a part of several local organizations, including Jefferson County Sustainability Commission and Northwest Metro Code Cohort group, a consortium of Front Range cities in Colorado, that are aligning on energy building codes. In Colorado, there is an endless assortment of local organizations focused on specific sustainability issues, from Conservation Colorado to New Energy Colorado and Colorado Renewable Energy Society, and at this point it's safe to say that, at least in Colorado, most cities and towns have one or more local organizations.

Colorado finally managed to ban plastic shopping bags and require a minimum 10¢ fee for paper bags. The state also banned Styrofoam take-out food containers after years of hard work and resistance from restaurants, manufacturers, and suppliers. Many cities within the state had already done so before the state did it. Feedback on bans at local levels was that it simply created a change in the kind of plastic trash, and that a bill requiring compostable containers would be better, but it's a start. Virginia, New Jersey, Massachusetts, and Maryland have also enacted single-use plastic bans.

In New York, former mayor Mike Bloomberg is spending millions on TV commercials targeting swing state attorneys general who are suing to overturn the EPA's Clean Power Plan.

All of these are inspiring and heartening examples of local action at the state to city and town levels that get things done for our environment in an era of hostility at the federal level. It's yet another way that we citizens really can have a voice for our planet, and if enough cities and states prioritize environmental sustainability, there may be a glimmer of hope yet.

The Lemmings

I hope from reading the above that you're beginning to understand that democracy is a privilege that can be taken away at any time. Democracy is not to be taken for granted. Freedom is not free. We as responsible citizens really have to pay attention to what's going on in our world and vote for good, responsible representatives, right up to the president. It turns out that an entire party can morph into pure evil, and actually put out a greedy, crooked, fascist candidate for the most powerful leadership position in the world right here in the U.S.A. Not just in Russia. Not just in Nicaragua. Not just in North Korea. Or China. Right here in America.

To be clear, brainwashing Americans in elections is nothing new, though in the past century or so it's been practiced mainly by Republicans as the party becomes more and more irrelevant and out of step with their own core ideology and what's needed on our planet today. The party basically wouldn't appeal to their followers if they were truthful about their agenda, so they lie to get elected. And extremely wealthy crooks pay for the media coverage so that they can stay wealthy at the expense of the rest of us.

Take Richard Nixon in 1968. He wasn't that popular, but he was packaged in such a way that voters went for him. And look how that turned out. One Nixon media advisor explained how they could get their candidate elected by transforming him into a media celebrity. "Voters are basically lazy," the advisor told reporter Joe McGinnis. "Reason requires a high degree of discipline, of concentration; impression is easier. Reason demands that the voter agree or disagree; impression can invite him in, without making an intellectual demand.... When we argue with him, we...seek to engage his intellect.... The emotions are more easily roused, closer to the surface, more malleable."²¹ So, what's your reaction to this assessment of the average voter? Are you insulted? If so, look in the mirror and figure out if they're talking about you. If they are, change and make them wrong. It shouldn't be hard if you pay attention.

Then there's the right-wing trickle-down economics theory, framed for the ignorant public as "tax reform", that flat-out refuses to come off the wall. It essentially means reducing taxes for the rich, and it's never worked

"The devil's best work was being able to convince evangelicals that a vulgar, greedy, racist man who has 5 children with 3 wives, pays porn stars for sex, gropes women, incites violence, and never tells the truth, was sent here by God." Michael Fanone



economically for the good of the general populace. Republicans continue to promote it, not because they're stupid enough to think it will work, but because they think the American public is stupid, and given that we just voted in Trump, they have a point. Part of the right-wing agenda to keep the rich rich and the rest of us uniformed and stuck in a rut is closely associated with their resistance to population control, to keep those new customers coming so the economy can continue to grow until we run out of resources.

In Ohio, the Republican-controlled Ohio Senate actually used the official state website to post false and misleading information against an abortion measure. They even went so far as to say that the measure would legalize abortion at any stage of pregnancy, and that conscious babies could be dismembered. This is the false information that's been pushed by anti-abortion activists, and is completely false, but lazy voters buy it without bothering to look up the actual facts. And, even worse, antiabortion activists even try and stop voters from signing petitions to get measures on ballots, or from voting if they do. All of this is blatant cheating and unacceptable. Or was. Again, if the truth about the issue doesn't work, or unethical activists don't think it will work, they resort to lying.

Now that we have a Supreme Court stacked with unethical judges appointed by Trump, the court voted to allow Arizona, a state governed by right extremists, to force voters to take their own ballots to their boxes. This is because they're trying to minimize the voice of indigenous voters that make up about 6% of the population in the state. It's yet another Republican manipulative act of blatant voting discrimination specifically aimed at decreasing the potential of electing Democrats. Historically, indigenous populations who often live hours away from ballot boxes in central locations have been allowed to employ representatives to collect their votes and take them to the ballot boxes. Again, if the Republican Party doesn't think they'll win with honest and ethical practices, they simply cheat. This is also going on throughout the country with the shenanigans of gerrymandering, to change already convoluted districts based on the population's political leanings to make it impossible for Democrats to win, even if they have the majority vote. Right here in America? Yep. We're every bit as corrupt as the worst countries in the world at this point.

Facing Change

Obviously, a lot has to change in our politics and our government in order to save our planet. Here are just a few of the changes we need.

- First and foremost is to keep our democracy for reals and not allow a dictator to take over. If we can't get that done, we're hosed.
- We have to cap campaign funding. Insane donations from wealthy individuals and corporations are resulting in puppets that represent the wealthy and not the people.
- Reject candidates who support the nonsensical "tax reform" that's reducing tax on the wealthy and taking money away from the rest of us.
- Beware of candidates that project hate and divisiveness, and bash their opponents rather than honestly describing their own platform. This should be common sense. After all, generally in life, most of us understand that gossips and bad-mouthers aren't to be trusted, so why would it be any different for politicians?
- Bother to fact check your candidates to keep them honest. This, too, is simple common sense. Or should be. You'd think.
- Support candidates who vote for and not against efforts to save and protect our environment and wildlife. This includes population control.
- Don't vote for candidates who are known to cheat, such as on their tax returns and in business dealings or have been convicted of crimes by juries. No one is above the law, including and particularly our national

leaders. They shouldn't even be allowed to run for office. We need honest, ethical leaders, not lying cheats who lack ethics.

- Don't vote for candidates who are known to be close to communist or fascist leaders. If they are wasting their time with this kind of scum, it can't be good. Especially if they're forcing their staff to leave meetings so they can meet privately with these kinds of smarmy leaders. Once again. Hello? McFly?
- Reject candidates who are known insurrectionists. This is treason in our country and punishable by death. Or at least it was. Again. Common sense.
- We need courageous leaders who stand for democracy and will stand up for democracy. We don't need a bunch of spineless has-been conservatives who will watch a bad president turn us into a dictatorship and murder and invade private citizens' homes without due process, without even doing anything about it.
- Vote for women if they are responsible candidates. The bias we have in this country against women in leadership is absurd and backwards. The fact is that women represent only 26.7% of national legislators globally. There is evidence that gender equity leads to more effective climate policies.¹⁶ This is because basically, women are smarter. For the most part. If nothing else, we're more empathetic. For the most part.
- Voter suppression should be treated as a form of treason in this country. After all, that's what it is. If we want to save our planet, we can't vote for environmentally-friendly candidates if voting is made inaccessible by manipulating cheaters who can't win any other way.
- Always vote.

Summary

Let's throw a very subjective number out for the impact of government on CO₂e emissions. Personally, given all the conniving and manipulating and policies that are completely against our planet when Republicans are in charge, and the challenge that Democrats have of reversing some of the damage as best they can in the short time they have in office, only to have it again unraveled by the next Republican administration, I think it's fair to hit the voters pretty hard on carbon footprint when it comes to our votes. It does make a huge difference. If we manage to save our democracy, we'll all have a voice, similar to that which we had before. Maybe a little different. Hopefully a little wiser. But still a voice either for or against the planet that we'll have the opportunity to use every two years when we vote for federal representatives, as well as for our governor and local representatives.

So, let's say the federal government has about a 50% weight in which way our climate goes. That's just my own thumbnail opinion, nothing more. But it's my book and that's what I'm using. And, given the discussion, I think it's probably conservative, no pun intended, but feel free to challenge me. Maybe I'll use your number when the next version comes out.

If you happen to be following the numbers on your own carbon footprint and actually taking some of what I've written and calculated to heart, we'll simply slap a factor on that to account for our voting choices. Let's make it simple. If you have been voting for Republicans, you should increase your carbon footprint by 50% because you're making the problem worse with your vote. Also, each party seems to be in charge about half the time, so the severe damage to the environment through irresponsible policy is in place about half the time. For my part, I vote for Democrats who care about our planet, who are truthful, and who don't support fascism or moving money from the everyday people to the ultra-rich. Therefore, I'll leave my CO₂e emissions at the 66.2% reduction from our national average.