

What Kind of America Do We Want?

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As I write in late July, wildfires are burning across the Eurasian Arctic as temperatures soar. These climate extremes remind us every month of the

urgency of the global renewable energy transition. Unfortunately, the global rise of nationalism is undermining the need to work together to solve these planetary-scale environmental issues.

Protection of the environment was once a national interest, one of the responsibilities of government to take care of the public interest and welfare. For decades, both of the major political parties in the U.S. supported this policy. This was the bargain with capitalist America that left our corporations free to focus on maximizing profit and productivity; while the government took responsibility for the broader long-term interests of society and local and global environmental issues. Now we have moved into a new political era, where this pact has disintegrated, and business and far-right wing groups have combined in an effort to dismantle this essential protective role of government.

For the business world, this is at least comprehensible, because only benefit corporations are committed to making a positive impact on society, their workers, the community and the environment in addition to making a profit. But the other strand, the rise to power of an American version of fascism is new. But it is one we must face, because so much that we treasure both in America and on Earth is at

stake.

Fortunately, this new American fascism is not well-disciplined like earlier versions in Europe in the last century. Unfortunately, its financial resources are large, because it has the backing of many corporations lured by reduced corporate taxes and reduced government regulation. If the gullible electorate can be bought this November, American democracy is in peril. I should say in disclosure that I was a child born into the wreckage of south-eastern England in September 1945, so I have a bleak perspective on fascism.

The president, who yearns to be an absolute ruler, has aligned his interests with the so-called "alt-right," a diverse collection of neo-fascists and white supremacists, along with the evangelical fundamentalists, who believe we should return to a white America with theirs the state religion. Our democracy is threatened because the Republican Party in Congress has abandoned most of its values and principles; and allied itself with this new American fascism that strongly supports the president. Lies, scapegoats and brutality are everywhere.

The Environmental Protection Agency, signed into law by Republican President



Arctic tundra burning. Image: Western Arctic National Parklands.

Nixon in 1970, is also threatened. Its recent corrupt administrator may have been fired, but the mission of the EPA is shifting from protecting human health and the environment to protecting polluting industries. We are undermining the protections of the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts to marginally increase corporate profits. The Republican Party is content with this rejection of its long-held commitments, provided it gets in return re-election payments from these businesses. Access by government scientists to the press has been curtailed to hide the dangers ahead from this policy shift.

Long-term issues like climate change and the need to shift to renewable energy are being buried in today's EPA. The Earth may have almost infinite resources that we

depend on; but since it has no money, it can be ignored, even though the downstream costs for life on Earth have become too vast to contemplate.

But the day of reckoning will come. Our national debt and our future debt to the planet are unpayable. Internally the president is attempting to discredit the federal government, and bully the free press in his quest for power. Externally, he has oscillated between bullying the rest of the world, and cozying up to dictators. All this has led to the collapse of U.S.

authority in the world.

None of this can be papered over by more transparent lies. Sadly, it is hard to confront corruption in our government. It is hard to deal with the conflict between the mythology of our great democracy, with government by the people and for the people; and the callous whims of a president who thinks the U.S. Constitution and the rule of law are dispensable.

But confront we must. The clock is ticking. Our communities and businesses should get together this summer, and ask what kind of America we want.

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