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What kind of America do we want?

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Protection of the environment was once a national interest, one of the responsibilities of government to take care of the public interest and welfare; as well as the interests of endangered species. 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 to dismantle this essential protective role of government.

For the business world this is 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: one I never anticipated when I started writing Planet columns 10 years ago. But we must face it, because so much that we treasure in America and on the Earth is at stake.

Fortunately this new American fascism is not well-disciplined like earlier versions in Europe 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 deep peril.

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 even the pretense of having values and principles, and allied itself with this new American fascism that strongly supports the president.

Lies, scapegoats and brutality are everywhere. Family values clearly only apply to white families: 'non-white' refugees and asylum seekers can be treated with open cruelty and internment camps – to send a message not to come to white America for refuge. Of course we ignore the many US interventions in Central America in recent decades that have contributed to the misery of these refugees.

Here at home, the Environmental Protection Agency, established by Republicans in 1970, is threatened. Its corrupt administrator may have been fired, but the mission of the EPA has been changed from protecting human health and the environment to protecting polluting industries. We are shredding the protections of the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts to marginally increase corporate profits. The concept that we are all responsible for clean water and clean air for the future has vanished. The Republican Party is happy with this destruction of its principles, as long

as 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 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 simply ignored, even though the downstream costs for life on Earth have become too vast to contemplate.

Now that this is all laid out, it is much easier to see the common threads between the cruel treatment of refugees, the exploitation of the poor, and the exploitation of the planet that was outlined so perceptively by the 2015 Papal Encyclical – that non-Catholic America mostly ignored. The immorality of putting short-term profit ahead of everything we treasure, whether the lives of our children, or life on Earth itself, cannot be hidden.

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, his fragile ego is attempting to bully the rest of the world: allies and competitors alike. This week, his insecurity drew him to side with Russia against the US intelligence agencies. All this has led to the collapse of US 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 US Constitution and the rule of law are dispensable.

But confront we must. Government used to be responsible for passing environmental laws and assessing taxes for the greater good of the people of America. Now we have a government where corporate and neo-fascist interests dominate, and government regulations are being repealed and dismantled for payment.

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