

Domestic and Global Issue Priorities - 2019

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There are a great many pressing needs that must be addressed in American society if we are to survive as a keystone representative democracy. And there are an equal number of needs at the global level that must be met if humans are to survive as a species in the civilized state. While there are many issues at both levels, there are two that are most essential to be dealt with and upon which resolution of many of the other issues depends.

At the domestic American level, the negative influence of money in politics is most critical. The trend toward gross economic inequality and oligarchy is clear especially in the last 50 years. During this time, the middle class has stagnated and declined with the advent of the global economy and the shift of the capitalistic enterprise to cheap labor markets in foreign countries. Corporations and their executives and shareholders have gleaned the great majority of the rewards of this international development. And the Republican Party has served the vested interests of the 1%ers – the mega corporations, financial institutions, and billionaires, while the Democratic Party has been complicit in spite of periodic complaints. At this point, the political process is essentially “owned” by the moneyed interests, their lobbyists and PACs who fund federal campaigns and literally write many of the self-interested laws that Congress enacts. This is how we get to virtually no federal inheritance tax and many corporations and billionaires paying nothing or pennies on the dollar on their income. Economic privilege, political power, and judicial representation are being bought by the wealthy. America has been here before – the end of the 18th century, and it took trust buster Teddy Roosevelt and a Depression to fully counter this condition. The Great Recession provided an opportunity to rein in the financial industry, but little was in fact done and much of what was done has been rescinded!

All of the other needs in American Society are blocked from significant attention by this money problem: health care, education, immigration, minimum wage, voting rights, and economic, gender, race and ethnic inequality. America succeeds and remains a leading force in promoting human rights and democracy to the extent it keeps an appropriate balance between its competitive capitalistic economy and its egalitarian democratic polity. Presently, the forces of the economy dominate and the country is playing with the fire of revolution and/or the steady loss of international standing. If Americans fail to fully cure their money in politics disease, they face a bleak future. The full cure: rescind the Citizens United Supreme Court decision, institute federally financed elections, greatly limit the campaign period, and restrain and regulate the PACs.

At the global level the key issue is human caused climate change. There are many other very important global scale matters that need to be addressed, but if climate change is not attended to promptly, these other matters will be rendered moot by the collective impact of the changes to the entire planetary climate system that are predicted. The pace of change estimated in the reports of the International Panel on Climate Change has been consistently too conservative because first the reports are subject to political input and second the models on which they depend are too often based on simply adding together the results of single variable analyzes – not adequately taking into account the compounding effect of the interaction among these variables. The overall result: we actually have much less time to get really serious if we are going to avoid the more dire consequences. And presently we are mostly twiddling our thumbs trying to reach international consensus on moderate “volunteer” CO2 reduction targets. This, while in a single generation we have increased the CO2 level by 50%.

Anyone who wants to understand the range of changes that singly and in combination can emerge in just the lifetime of those being born today, should read the just released work: David Wallace-Wells, Uninhabitable Earth, New York, 2019. This work pulls no punches and includes 65 pages of documentary notes. It paints a grim picture of our future unless the global community immediately comes together, fully cooperates, and rapidly converts from fossil fuels to alternative energy sources. Wallace-Wells examines shorter and longer period global effects from heat waves, to severe fires, storms and floods, to diminished food production/starvation, to massive migrations, to conflict/warfare, to epidemics/ pandemics, to economic stress/collapse as nearly one third of the Earth – where three billion humans presently live – becomes uninhabitable. The message is: Stop procrastinating, unite internationally, and create the global level, government supported “Manhattan Project” level assessment and plan. And if technology can make a realistic and substantial contribution, the results must be available to all to develop and implement. There is no time for competitive, corporate based, patent oriented solutions designed to financially benefit a few. We are literally an average human lifetime away from the potential demise of the civilized human condition. All other human problems pale in comparison, and all other problems are hugely magnified if the challenge of climate change is not rapidly resolved.

Conclusion: Domestically Americans need to eliminate the negative effect of money in politics in part so they can immediately get serious about dealing with the universal human challenge posed by impending climate change. The “developed,” western countries are focally responsible for this global problem. These countries must take the major responsibility for rectifying this situation.