

LIBERTARIAN TREEHUGGER

How Free Markets and Rational Thought can Help Solve
Some of Today's Biggest Environmental and Social Problems



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Dedicated to the Memory of Carlos Batts

Introduction

PART I

Stupid Treehugger!

Chapter 1

Why I Don't Believe in Climate Change

Chapter 2

The Inconvenient Truth About Clean Energy

Chapter 3

You are What You Eat

PART II

Domestic Warfare

Chapter 4

The War on Poverty

Chapter 5

The War on Drugs

PART III

Gays, Guns and Dunces Caps

Chapter 6

Betrothed in Bigotry

Chapter 7

Teaching, Preaching & the Decline of Public Education

Chapter 8

The Second Amendment is NOT Optional

Part IV

Back to the Future: Archival Rants of a Libertarian Treehugger

- The FDA's \$3 Million Welfare Scam
- The White House is for Sale!

- Terrorists Discovered Working in U.S. Sheriff's Office
- Fake Patriots Unite
- The Biggest Obama Scandal Yet
- Morality is Dying
- Speak Loudly and Carry a Twig
- How to Silence the Press
- I'm Bullish on Organic Marijuana
- Don't Sweat the Debt, it's Darwin Day!
- Are Voter ID Laws Unconstitutional?
- Mother Nature Doesn't Need a Government Handout

Introduction

It was in 1975 that I first saw “Iron Eyes” Cody shed that single tear in a “Keep America Beautiful” commercial on television. That was the day I became an environmentalist. And I make no apologies for this. It is absolutely incomprehensible to me how anyone could take all the beauty God has created and treat it like a sewer.

That being said, I’m also a capitalist. I firmly believe there is no better system for maintaining peace, enabling tolerance and facilitating a high standard of living, than an honest free market. This is a belief I’ve long held, and it is a belief I often find at odds with many of my environmentalist friends who blame capitalism for many of today’s environmental and social problems. However, if you look at most environmental and social problems that plague the world, you’ll find that it is not free market economics that are to blame, but rather irresponsible individuals who lack morals, ethics, and a regard for the right of all people to live free from tyranny...

It’s politicians who look the other way when polluters fill their campaign coffers. Corporate CEOs who advocate unrestricted growth at the expense of clean water, food, and air. Talk show hosts who mock any attempt to preserve the planet for future generations. I find this to be especially true of many in conservative media who often go out of their way to create the illusion that to be a conservative you mustn’t show the slightest interest in environmental sustainability.

I’m not exactly sure when this started, but I’ve never understood this mentality. It just makes no sense. What benefit do any of us gain when we pollute our air, deplete our soil of nutrients, and poison our water? Seems to me that of all the issues that divide us, preserving the health of the planet to ensure our own survival would be one that would unite us. Yet politicians and media gate keepers continue to go out of their way to create this divide, as it serves their own self-interests. And the tragedy is that we, as a nation, continue to fall for it.

On the flip side, it’s very common for those on the left to rebuke any common-sense approaches to environmental protection unless the government is involved. Folks, the government is already involved on so many levels, and yet we are still overwhelmed with a heavy environmental burden. The solution to today’s most pressing environmental problems will not be found in the halls of Congress, but instead in the mirror and in the private sector. The quicker we realize this, the quicker we can stop relying on bureaucrats to fix a problem we can fix ourselves. And that’s why I decided to write this book: To get this conversation started.

The Birth of a Libertarian Treehugger

I’ve been called many things in my life – a rock star, a sellout, a capitalist asshole. But it was a few years back when someone referred to me as a “Libertarian Treehugger – and I didn’t know

how to take it. It was an odd thing to be called, as I'm not actually a registered libertarian, nor do I hug trees. But I knew what he meant.

I've never taken the time to register as a Libertarian simply because, despite the title of this book, I'm not big on labels. I'm an independent voter, and I don't like to be "locked -in" to a specific philosophy or political affiliation. Yet at some point, I found that much of what I've always believed does lean towards a Libertarian point of view. I'm not a fan of big government, excessive regulation, and attacks on economic freedom, and I reject those who attempt to legislate morality or infringe upon my Constitutional rights as a U.S. citizen.

Of course, this doesn't necessarily mean I'm a Libertarian. Certainly there are some Libertarians who will disagree –based on libertarian theory –with some of what I've written in this book. And, based on theory, they would be right to do so.

So, no, I don't officially consider myself a Libertarian, but plenty have attached that label to me. And quite frankly, being both a supporter of liberty and a defender of the planet, I actually kind of like the moniker "Libertarian Treehugger. It just makes sense to me.

In the Presence of Liberty

In this book, my only intention is really to start an honest conversation about how environmental and social causes are intertwined with the cause of liberty. It is in the absence of liberty that we condemn ourselves to an uninhabitable planet and an intolerant society. It is in the presence of liberty that we thrive on a healthy planet and in a tolerant society.

I do hope you read this book with an open mind and consider the damage we do to our country and ourselves when we allow the government and the media to instigate hostility and divisiveness. No matter which side of the aisle you call home, which news channel you watch, or where you choose to worship, there is one undeniable truth about this planet. It is our home. And we only hurt ourselves when we treat it and its inhabitants with malice, contempt, and irrelevance.

PART I

Stupid Treehugger!

Chapter 1

Why I Don't Believe in Climate Change

In science, nothing is ever 100% proven

– Michio Kaku

The Climate Change Division

Climate change has proven to be a very divisive issue –particularly in politics where Democrats and Republicans continuously battle it out in an attempt to cater to their respective constituents. However, for the purpose of this book, I'm not going to focus on climate change as a political maneuver or fodder for debate. I'll leave that for the folks whose careers live and die by the ballot. Instead, I'll take a step back and look at climate change from a more pragmatic point of view, thereby allowing us to investigate climate change without the clutter and noise of opportunistic politicians and shady bureaucrats.

Is Climate Change Scientific Theory or Reality?

The National Academy of Science defines scientific theory as “a well-substantiated explanation of some aspect of the natural world that can incorporate facts, laws, inferences, and tested hypotheses.” The Academy's definition further explains:

“In science, theories do not turn into facts through the accumulation of evidence. Rather, theories are the end points of science. They are understandings that develop from extensive observation, experimentation, and creative reflection. They incorporate a large body of scientific facts, laws, tested hypotheses, and logical inferences.”

That is, scientists do not claim all scientific theories to be concrete, undisputed truths. They are however, able to defend their theories with copious amounts of rigorous evidence. Based on this explanation, it seems to me that climate change has all the markers of a scientific theory. Moreover, because it is scientific theory, it is completely acceptable to challenge that theory. To demonize a person for not accepting the scientific theory of climate change seems to go against the very nature of scientific inquiry, which essentially encourages us to keep our minds open to the curiosities of the natural world.

Of course, because the scientific theory of climate change is supported by more than 90% of the world's top climatologists, it is understandable that those who wish to challenge this theory are met with an overwhelming amount of skepticism. That being said, there was a time when there

was agreement that the Earth was flat with waterfalls around the edge that would pull ships down into an abyss where giant serpents would devour unsuspecting sailors. There was also a time when the general consensus was that the Earth was the center of the universe. Truth is, history is filled with theories that, over time, proved to not only be inaccurate, but quite over-the-top.

Nonetheless, the scientific theory of climate change is supported by many. So we must first ask ...

What is Climate Change?

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), climate change describes a change in the state of the climate that can be identified by changes in the mean and/or the variability of its properties and that persists for an extended period, typically decades or longer.

That's a bit of a mouthful, and there are actually a number of varying definitions, albeit with the same general interpretations. However, for many, the concern over climate change is not the definition but rather the outcome if climate change is, in fact, underway.

The consensus among most climatologists is that climate change will usher in a wave of extreme weather conditions ranging from hurricanes and heat waves to severe droughts and floods. If this is true, and a rapidly changing climate is happening, then it is certainly understandable that most folks would be concerned. And that really brings us to the crux of this debate.

The Climate Change Religion

There's been more than one occasion when someone has asked me whether or not I believe in climate change. And my answer is always the same: no. I don't believe in climate change because I don't think climate change is something to believe in. I know that sounds confusing, so let me explain.

The way I see it, the scientific theory of climate change is –or at least should be –based on scientific investigation using various data, not faith. So when presented with the data, I can make a decision as to whether or not I find that data and data analysis to be sound. I don't “believe” in data. I merely draw conclusions from it.

A great way to further explain this is through a quote from author and evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins, who wrote:

“[Religion and science] ...are deeply opposed. Science is a discipline of investigation and constructive doubt, questing with logic, evidence and reason to draw conclusions. Faith, by stark contrast, demands a positive suspension of critical

faculties.

Sciences proceeds by setting up hypotheses, ideas or models and then attempts to disprove them. So a scientist is constantly asking questions, being skeptical. Religion is about turning untested belief into unshakeable truth through the power of institutions and the passage of time.”

So if you ask me whether or not I believe in climate change, the only response I can offer is no. Although if you ask me whether or not I find the data and data analysis that supports the scientific theory of climate change to be sound, my answer is this ...

Based on my limited knowledge of climate science, I can only rely on the conclusions that are presented to me from the experts who I trust are seeking only to provide objective analysis of climate change data. In the world of climate change research, the IPCC is assumed to be the foremost authority. And while some will challenge that assumption (which is perfectly legitimate if you trust that the scientific theory is meant to be challenged), I have yet to uncover any other group of climate scientists offering the same kind of scope of research in this arena.

That doesn't mean we shouldn't investigate the other side of the coin. But first, let's take a look at what the IPCC tells us.

What's the IPCC?

Before we discuss the IPCC's findings, we should know exactly what the IPCC is and what it does. According to IPCC representatives, the IPCC is an international group of scientists that “reviews and assesses the scientific, technical and socio-economic information produced worldwide relevant to the understanding of climate change.”

Here's what the IPCC has to say about climate change:

“It is extremely likely that human influence has been the dominant cause of the observed warming since the mid-20th century. The evidence for this has grown, thanks to more and better observations, an improved understanding of the climate system response and improved climate models.

Warming in the climate system is unequivocal and since 1950 many changes have been observed throughout the climate system that are unprecedented over decades to millennia. Each of the last three decades has been successively warmer at the Earth's surface than any preceding decade since 1850.

Observations of changes in the climate system are based on multiple lines of independent evidence. Our assessment of the science finds that the atmosphere and ocean have warmed, the amount of snow and ice has diminished, the global

mean sea level has risen and the concentrations of greenhouse gases have increased.

Continued emissions of greenhouse gases will cause further warming and changes in all components of the climate system. Limiting climate change will require substantial and sustained reductions of greenhouse gas emissions.

Global surface temperature change for the end of the 21st century is projected to likely exceed 1.5 degrees celsius relative to 1850 to 1900 in all but the lowest scenario considered, and likely to exceed 2 degrees celsius for the two high scenarios. Heat waves are very likely to occur more frequently and last longer. As the Earth warms, we expect to see currently wet regions receiving more rainfall, and dry regions receiving less, although there will be exceptions.

Projections of climate change are based on a new set of four scenarios of future greenhouse gas concentrations and aerosols, spanning a wide range of possible futures.

As the ocean warms, and glaciers and ice sheets reduce, global mean sea level will continue to rise, but at a faster rate than we have experienced over the past 40 years.

As a result of our past, present and expected future emissions of CO₂, we are committed to climate change, and effects will persist for many centuries even if emissions of CO₂ stop.”

I'm not going to make this book 500 pages longer by sharing all the data the IPCC reviewed. However, if you'd like to investigate it further, you can review the IPCC's complete assessment report on its website, www.ipcc.ch.

That was just a brief synopsis of the IPCC's assessment of climate change data. As I already wrote, I'm not a climate scientist, so I can't say with absolute certainty that I understand all the analyses. Much of the general population shares my handicap when it comes to scientific studies. Unfortunately, our inability to grasp the technical analysis of the IPCC's assessments makes it fairly easy for others to present opposing and somewhat persuasive viewpoints. Included among them are numerous counter arguments put forth by equally accomplished scientists –the most common being that changes in climate have occurred throughout time and the human impact on the current global climate condition is minimal at best.

For most of us there is no way to determine which viewpoint is sound and which is not. However, we can investigate those who make these arguments to determine who is the most credible within the scientific community. If a scientist's work is vetted and accepted as rigorous scientific research by his or her peers, then it seems irrational to deny it based on one's own tenuous understanding of climatology. Scientist James Powell, who was a member of the National Science Board after being appointed by President Reagan, wrote in 2012:

“The gold standard of science is the peer-reviewed literature. If there is

disagreement among scientists, based not on opinion but on hard evidence, it will be found in the peer-reviewed literature.”

Powell ended up reviewing 13,950 peer-reviewed articles published about climate change, 13,926 of which supported the scientific theory of climate change. Powell expanded on his research in 2013 and found that of the 2,258 peer-reviewed articles published about climate change between 2012 and 2013, only one rejected the IPCC’s assessment. Similarly, I’ve seen little in the way of objective peer review or published papers from those who challenge the IPCC’s theory.

Does this prove that those who have challenged the IPCC are wrong? No. But it does mean that, despite what some in the media may tell you, there really is a consensus on climate change. (For the sake of clarification, the word consensus is defined as a general agreement or judgment arrived at by most of those concerned.)

Now regardless of which analysis you personally find to be sound and accurate, the consensus on the cause of climate change is strong enough that the move to attempt to limit the release of CO2 emissions is going to happen. It’s already underway. But as a free-market thinker, I find it incredibly irresponsible to let big government zealots dictate which mechanisms accomplish this goal.

A Free Market Solution to Climate Change

It is not my intention to convince you one way or the other on climate change. You have your own mind and you can draw your own conclusions based on the data analysis you find most compelling. But no matter how you slice it, more and more governments around the globe are seeking ways to mitigate climate change. And this is where the real battle lies for free market thinkers.

Whether or not climate change is real or is happening primarily because of humans has nothing to do with the foundations of freedom, liberty or capitalism. These are simply questions, theories and opinions. If I find the IPCC’s climate change data analysis to be sound, it doesn’t affect your ability to live free. Just as those who find the IPCC’s climate change data analysis to be flawed have no affect on my ability to live free. What *can* affect our ability to live free, however, is the government’s response to climate change theory.

Here’s the problem ...

While I find my opinion on climate change to be based primarily on the IPCC’s findings, my opinion on how to combat this threat is one based solely on a free market system. You see, in an attempt to tackle the climate change issue, Washington lawmakers have really only proposed two solutions, both of which are severely flawed.

The first, and the one you're probably most familiar with is cap and trade. Cap and trade, sometimes known as "emissions trading," is boasted as a free market approach to slowing the threat of climate change by providing economic incentives and subsidies for those companies that can reduce CO2 emissions. But this is a not free market solution, because someone, or rather something, must offer economic incentives and subsidies. That would be the government. That alone means this cannot be properly defined as a "free market" approach.

Quite frankly, the whole concept of cap and trade takes a basic problem and attempts to rectify it in an inherently complex way, while tasking the government with the responsibility of running yet another program to be funded by taxpayer dollars and more debt. This is not a responsible solution, nor is it one that wouldn't be exploited by unethical lawmakers.

The government has offered another solution, however, and that's simply a carbon tax. But such a suggestion is a complete waste of time. In this day and age, with so many folks struggling just to put food on the table, it would be nearly impossible to drum up enough support for such a thing. And even if voters did go for it, do we really want the government getting access to even more of our money so they can spend it like drunken rappers on a video shoot?

So the question is, if climate change is real, and humans are largely responsible –what *is* the solution?

Or better yet, if this is a problem, how did we get here? Because if we can get to the root of the problem, it's much easier to find a solution.

This Could Get Expensive

The majority of man-made greenhouse gases comes from the burning of fossil fuels. I don't say this, by the way, to attack the oil and coal companies. This is nothing more than the conclusions of objective data analysis.

Now the bottom line is that the continued burning of fossil fuels is really the result of the market. Fossil fuels are much cheaper to use for transportation fuels and utility-scale power generation than anything else. Therefore, the world continues to rely on them. But are fossil fuels really cheap? In other words, does the price at the pump or the price per kilowatt hour of electricity actually take into account all costs involved in production and distribution? Absolutely not.

You see, the burning of fossil fuels leads to the deterioration of what we call natural capital. This includes resources we use regularly –things like water, minerals, soil, air, oil and trees. It includes living systems, too, such as oceans, coral reefs, grasslands and rainforests. Little attention is ever given to natural capital. Rarely is it valued, and often it is liquidated, which further contributes to the deterioration of services the ecosystem provides. I'm talking about things like water, pollination, and yes, the regulation of atmosphere and climate.

It's hard to put a price tag on natural capital, but I've seen estimates as low as \$2 trillion a year to as high as \$6 trillion a year. Yet not a single dollar is ever included in economic measurements of GDP. If these costs were figured into the equation, how cheap would fossil fuels be?

Of course, this section is about climate change, not all of the other environmental burdens associated with fossil fuel production. And in all fairness, no form of transportation fuel or power generation is environmentally benign. That includes solar, wind and geothermal. But when it comes to climate change, fossil fuels bear most of the responsibility. Or rather, all of us who continue to rely on "cheap" fossil fuels bear most of the responsibility. It should also be noted that, much like renewable energy, fossil fuels also receive their fair share of taxpayer-funded subsidies and incentives. Some direct, some indirect, but all relying on the blind generosity of every American.

Now here we are in a situation where we are being sold the illusion that fossil fuels are cheap, and therefore cannot be replaced with cleaner forms of energy. We're also looking at fossil fuels being largely responsible for human-induced climate change, but it's hard to get folks to turn away from fossil fuels when they are so "cheap" to use.

So do we run to the government to save us? Demand that a bunch of politicians in Washington intervene? My friends, that would be the worst thing to do. In fact, I would argue that it is because of government intervention that we are in this situation today.

Free Market Solutions to Climate Change

One way to mitigate CO2 emissions is to use less fossil fuels and more renewable energy. But legislating such a thing isn't necessary.

The truth is, most forms of renewable energy, which contribute much less over time to the threat of climate change, are experiencing rapid decreases in production costs. In some parts of the world, solar, wind and geothermal are already cheaper than fossil fuels. And this is a trend that will continue for decades to come. Meanwhile, fossil fuel costs are only going to continue to head north.

It should also be noted that in 2012, carbon emissions in the United States fell to an 18-year low while GDP increased by 2.8%. That's right, we were able to decrease carbon emissions without inhibiting growth. Much of that decrease was the result of an increase in the use of natural gas, a continued rise in renewable energy (particularly wind in the Midwest and solar all across the nation), and efforts by many individuals and businesses to integrate more energy efficiency and conservation measures into their homes and offices.

Of course, the bounty of natural gas with which the United States has been blessed does not carry over to other parts of the world. But we can only control what we do here, in our own

backyard. Yes, climate change is a global issue, but we cannot be a global provider of climate change solutions. Or can we?

Capitalism: Ain't it Great?

Actually, with the very real increased global demand for renewable energy and energy efficiency measures, a number of U.S. companies are cleaning up by providing clean energy solutions across the globe. From solar panels in Saudi Arabia to wind turbines in Poland, American ingenuity is providing both domestic job creation and solutions to climate change in other parts of the world.

So while our elected officials continue to draft climate change policies, the market is providing solutions right now. We can see this by observing things like the rapid integration of solar and wind energy, the robust growth in the hybrid and electric vehicle market and the steady increase in public transportation ridership. The truth is consumer behavior is already proving to be one of the most effective catalysts for decreasing CO2 emissions. This should be the focus for those who find the theory of climate change to be both compelling and worrisome –not more government intervention.

However, much more could be done if we truly wanted to embrace a real and honest free market.

The Government Subsidizes Climate Change

As I already mentioned, the largest sources of human-induced climate change can be traced back to our use of fossil fuels –which are heavily subsidized with your tax dollars.

Now, there are a number of estimates for these subsidies, and much of this is due to what actually represents a subsidy. A subsidy, as defined by Merriam-Webster is money that is paid usually by a government to keep the price of a product or service low or to help a business or organization to continue to function. So in the case of fossil fuel subsidies, these can include any kind of government action that lowers the cost of production, increases prices paid to producers, or enables consumers to pay lower prices.

In a report prepared by the OECD, some of these subsidies come in the form of:

- Policies governing the terms of access to domestic on-shore and off-shore resources
- Policies that reduce costs to particular types of customers or regions by increasing charges on other customers or regions.
- Direct budgetary outlays for an energy-related purpose

- Restrictions on the free market flow of energy products and services between countries
- Provisions of market-related information that would otherwise have to be purchased by private market participants
- Below-market provisions of loans or loan guarantees for energy-related activities
- Direct regulation of wholesale or retail energy prices
- Required purchase of particular energy commodities
- Partial or full government funding for energy-related research and development
- Government regulatory efforts that substantially alter the rights and responsibilities of various parties in energy markets, or exempt certain parties from those changes
- Government-provided insurance or indemnification at below-market prices
- Special tax levies or exemptions for energy-related activities

Combined, fossil fuel subsidies range somewhere between \$14 billion and \$52 billion annually. That ain't chump change, my friend. But if you cut those subsidies (which should not be opposed by any free market thinker), and let these industries rely on their own merits without government assistance, we could soon find a solution to climate change that, instead of pilfering taxpayers, would actually alleviate a major burden on taxpayers. Because quite frankly, I'm confident that on a level playing field, where the government is completely removed from the equation, it will be renewable energy and cleaner transportation fuels and technology that will prove to be economically superior to fossil fuels over the long-term.

Of course, an added benefit here is that those who find it in their best interests to combat the threat of climate change can take comfort in the fact that the free market is, in fact, facilitating a solution. And those who find the theory of climate change to be flawed have no reason to fear the government stealing more of their hard-earned money to combat a problem they don't believe actually exists.

No reason for name-calling, no reason for government hearings and no reason to divide our nation over this issue. Seems like a good plan to me.

Chapter 2

The Inconvenient Truth About Clean Energy

We are like tenant farmers chopping down the fence around our house for fuel when we should be using Nature's inexhaustible sources of energy – sun, wind and tide. I'd put my money on the sun and solar energy. What a source of power! I hope we don't have to wait until oil and coal run out before we tackle that.

– Thomas Edison

Dirty, Clean or Somewhere in Between?

It's not uncommon for environmentalists to align themselves with those who support both the rapid integration of renewable energy and the rapid phase out of fossil fuels. Their argument is that fossil fuels are dirty and pose very serious threats to the environment, while renewable energy is clean and poses no real threat to the planet.

While I certainly advocate the continued transition of our energy economy to one that is much cleaner and much more sustainable –both environmentally and economically –the truth is renewable energy isn't without its own environmental and economic downfalls.

In this chapter, I'll take a closer look at the environmental benefits and shortcomings of both fossil fuels and renewable energy. As well, I'll investigate whether or not renewable energy can economically compete with fossil fuels without the assistance of the government.

The Clean Energy Myth

Clean energy isn't actually "clean." The truth is that there is no form of electricity production or transportation fuel that is environmentally benign. Every power source carries with it an environmental burden –some, more than others. But the declaration that solar or wind or geothermal is "clean energy" isn't entirely accurate.

For instance, there are toxicity issues with certain types of solar panel production. Certain chemicals used in the production process can be incredibly hazardous to humans, and if not monitored properly, could cause serious health concerns for those living and working around these production facilities.

To give you an example, a few years back it was reported that a waste disposal facility operated by Chinese solar manufacturer Jinko Solar was leaking fluoride that ultimately ended up in a river where nearby residents discovered a massive fish kill.

In 2013, Abound Solar, a U.S. company that filed for bankruptcy, put nearby residents at risk after inspectors found the presence of cadmium at the company's facility. Cadmium is used for certain types of thin-film solar panels. It's also a known cause of certain types of cancer. One report noted it would cost nearly \$4 million to clean the facility.

Of course, these are just two extreme examples. Most solar manufacturers are actually pretty vigilant about maintaining high environmental standards. But beyond the production process, you still have the environmental impact of mining certain materials, logistics, water usage, etc. And this is the case for wind, geothermal and energy conservation and efficiency products, too. As I said, no form of power production or transportation fuel is environmentally benign. Thus, I rarely refer to renewable energy as clean energy. Instead, I refer to it as "cleaner energy."

From the Cradle to the Grave

Although there's no doubt that renewable energy is shackled to an environmental footprint, if you look at the entire process –from cradle to grave –renewable energy, if done right, is environmentally superior to fossil fuels and other forms of conventional power production.

You see, whether you're building a natural gas-fired power plant or a wind farm, you will require certain materials and manufacturing processes that will have some kind of negative effect on the environment. There's no way around it, and it's a reality that overzealous environmentalists must accept. However, the source of fuel on which we rely is what makes all the difference.

Oil, gas, coal, uranium – all of this stuff has to be mined and produced. It can be quite destructive to the environment, particularly when unethical producers disregard systems that are in place to help alleviate some of those environmental burdens. With renewable energy, however, your "fuel" doesn't harm the environment; it's *part* of the environment. Sunshine, wind, the motion of the waves –all of this stuff is, in fact, environmentally benign. It cannot be spilled, it cannot poison our water, and it cannot fill our skies with smog and soot. This, is the environmental benefit of cleaner energy.

Again, this doesn't mean there are no environmental burdens to bear with renewable energy. But those burdens are significantly less when compared to fossil fuels.

A Major Transition

While I continue to champion the environmental benefits of renewable energy, this doesn't mean fossil fuels don't play an important role in our modern-day society. They absolutely do.

The trucks that move our wind turbines are powered by diesel. The steel used for wind turbine towers, pipes, racking mounts, and a whole host of other necessary materials required for

renewable energy exists because of the availability of metallurgical coal. Nuclear power helps heat our homes in the winter; natural gas provides us with both utility-scale power generation and transportation fuels. The truth is, our very fortunate way of life today is the direct result of abundant fossil fuel resources.

That being said, our energy economy is not a stagnant one. It grows and develops with the advent of new technologies, the depletion of traditional resources and societal demands. This is how it's always been. If this weren't the case, you would heat your home with wood and rely on horses and rickshaws to get to work everyday.

The fact is, energy markets are constantly evolving. And today, we are at the dawn of a major transition of our energy economy to one that will ultimately be heavily weighted in renewables –not necessarily because fossil fuels carry with them a greater environmental burden compared to renewables, but because the market is dictating this transition, thanks mostly to entrepreneurship, necessity and forward-thinking ingenuity.

The Great Oil and Gas Promise

The great promise of renewables goes far beyond cleaner air and water. In fact, I would argue that the environmental benefits are just icing on the cake.

Strictly from a free-market standpoint, renewable energy is both economically and strategically superior due to little more than the basic fundamentals of supply and demand.

You see, these days, thanks to the shale boom, the United States is swimming in domestic oil and natural gas. Truth is, the United States is now the world's biggest oil producer. This, by the way, is less than 45 years after the infamous OPEC oil embargo of 1973. But the question is, how long will this boom last?

Although still controversial (because few openly question the American oil and gas renaissance), there is significant concern that expedited decline rates of shale oil and gas production could result in this boom going bust in less than 20 years.

In 2013, investment guru Bill Powers wrote:

There is production decline in the Haynesville and Barnett Shales. Output is declining in the Woodford Shale in Oklahoma. Some of the older shale plays, such as the Fayetteville Shale, are starting to roll over. As these shale plays reverse direction and the Marcellus Shale slows down its production growth, overall U.S. production will fall.

At the same time, Canadian production is falling. And Canada has historically

been the main natural gas import source for the U.S. In fact, Canada has already experienced a significant decline in gas production — about 25%, since a peak in 2002 — and has dramatically slowed its exports to the United States.

And energy and oil expert Chris Nelder published the following segment in 2012:

... the decline rates of shale gas wells are steep. They vary widely from play to play, but the output of shale gas wells commonly falls by 50% to 60% or more in the first year of production. This is why I have called it a treadmill: you have to keep drilling furiously to maintain flat output.

In the U.S., the aggregate decline of natural gas production from both conventional and unconventional sources is now 32% per year, so 22 bcf/d of new production must be added every year to keep overall production flat, according to Canadian geologist David Hughes. That's close to the total output of U.S. shale gas, after nearly a decade of its development. It will require thousands more shale gas and tight oil wells to keep domestic gas production flat.

If Powers and Nelder are right, this does not bode well for “dirt-cheap” natural gas as far as the eye can see.

And the outlook for oil may be worse ...

In a 2013 *Bloomberg* piece, analyst Asjylyn Loder wrote the following:

Chesapeake Energy's Serenity 1-3H well near Oklahoma City came in as a gusher in 2009, pumping more than 1,200 barrels of oil a day and kicking off a rush to drill that extended into Kansas. Now the well produces less than 100 barrels a day, state records show. Serenity's swift decline sheds light on a dirty secret of the oil boom: It may not last. Shale wells start strong and fade fast, and producers are drilling at a breakneck pace to hold output steady. In the fields, this incessant need to drill is known as the Red Queen, after the character in *Through the Looking-Glass* who tells Alice, “It takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place.”

In North Dakota's Bakken Shale, a well formally known as Robert Heuer 1-17R put out 2,358 barrels in May 2004, when it went live. The output proved there was money to be made drilling in the Bakken and kicked off an oil rush in North Dakota. Continental Resources, the well's operator, built a monument to it. Production declined 69 percent in the first year.

According to geoscientist David Hughes, the U.S. must drill 6,000 new wells per year at a cost of \$35 billion to maintain current production. He also notes that the newest wells aren't as productive as previous wells drilled in the same locations during the first few years of the shale boom.

Hughes believes production will peak in 2017 and fall back down to 2012 levels two years later.

Of course, I'm no geologist. I can't say with 100% certainty if Hughes is right or wrong. What I do know is that it is absolutely accurate that decline rates for shale production are very steep, and they come very quickly. With this in mind, it seems quite dangerous and irresponsible to put all of our eggs in the shale basket, completely abandoning future alternatives to cheap oil and gas.

Nuclear's Melting Down

While renewable energy has been the recipient of billions of dollars in subsidies, there is no industry that has returned a less-impressive ROI with taxpayer dollars than nuclear. As reliable as nuclear power is, the bottom line is that after 50 years it's still not economically viable without subsidies.

An excellent report on nuclear power subsidies was published by the non-partisan group Union of Concerned Scientists. As explained in the report, there is a very skewed economic picture of nuclear power's value compared with other power sources. Check it out ...

Throughout its history, the industry has argued that subsidies were only temporary, a short-term stimulus so the industry could work through early technical hurdles that prevented economical reactor operation. A 1954 advertisement from General Electric stated that, "In five years—certainly within ten," civilian reactors would be "privately financed, built without government

subsidy." That day never arrived and, despite industry claims to the contrary, remains as elusive as ever.

The most important subsidies to the industry do not involve cash payments. Rather, they shift construction-cost and operating risks from investors to taxpayers and ratepayers, burdening taxpayers with an array of risks ranging from cost overruns and defaults to accidents and nuclear waste management. This approach, which has remained remarkably consistent throughout the industry's history, distorts market choices that would otherwise favor less risky investments.

Although it may not involve direct cash payments, such favored treatment is nevertheless a subsidy, with a profound effect on the bottom line for the industry and taxpayers alike. Reactor owners, therefore, have never been economically responsible for the full costs and risks of their operations. Instead, the public faces the prospect of severe losses in the event of any number of potential adverse scenarios, while private investors reap the rewards if nuclear plants are economically successful. For all practical purposes, nuclear power's economic gains are privatized, while its risks are socialized.

The nuclear industry is only able to portray itself as a low-cost power supplier

today because of past government subsidies and writeoffs. First, the industry received massive subsidies at its inception, reducing both the capital costs it needed to recover from ratepayers (the “legacy” subsidies that underwrote reactor construction through the 1980s) and its operating costs (through ongoing subsidies to inputs, waste management, and accident risks). Second, the industry wrote down tens of billions of dollars in capital costs after its first generation of reactors experienced large cost overruns, cancellations, and plant abandonments, further reducing the industry’s capital-recovery requirements. Finally, when industry restructuring revealed that nuclear power costs were still too high to be competitive, so-called stranded costs were shifted to utility ratepayers, allowing the reactors to continue operating.

These legacy subsidies are estimated to exceed seven cents per kilowatt-hour (¢/kWh)—an amount equal to about 140 percent of the average wholesale price of power from 1960 to 2008, making the subsidies more valuable than the power produced by nuclear plants over that period. Without these subsidies, the industry would have faced a very different market reality—one in which many reactors would never have been built, and utilities that did build reactors would have been forced to charge consumers even higher rates.

A Politically-Incorrect Observation

Beyond the economic burden of building, maintaining and decommissioning nuclear power plants, there are also the perceived dangers of nuclear power. I say “perceived” because it’s not uncommon for the “dangers” of nuclear power to be exaggerated.

As I previously stated, no form of power production is environmentally benign. Although, as we’ve seen in Fukushima, the health concerns and environmental destruction resulting from nuclear meltdowns are much more severe than those from natural gas explosions or falling wind turbines.

But Fukushima was not a nuclear crisis because the process of nuclear power generation is inherently unsafe; it was a crisis because of human error. Sub-par safety procedures and poor logistical planning were to blame, not the splitting of isotopes.

It’s not that I distrust nuclear physics. I just don’t really trust people so much –especially bureaucrats who tend to make the types of decisions that affect public safety. This is one of the reasons I’m so critical of government efforts to “protect” us.

Now, it should be noted that there’s little chance of any kind of nuclear renaissance happening in the United States. Economically, socially and politically, it’s just a non-starter. But globally, nuclear power development is growing rapidly, particularly in China, India, South Korea and the

Middle East.

I know this may not be politically correct, but I have a really hard time feeling comfortable with some of these regions looking to build hundreds of nuclear power plants.

China still has a lot of “quality control” issues to deal with. I don’t trust the food that comes from China, much less a nuclear power plant built there. India, meanwhile, still needs help from the International Monetary Fund to build its outdated –and in some cases non-existent –infrastructure. The last thing the world needs is a handful of half-built nuclear power plants left in unguarded, poverty-stricken areas. And the Middle East? Folks, no offense, but unstable regions don’t typically strike me as the most desirable places to build nuclear power plants. And speaking of instability, I’m not feeling particularly excited about the increase in nuclear power development in Russia, either.

I’m not saying the folks in these regions don’t have a right to build nuclear power plants. They absolutely do, and it’s arrogant as hell to believe the United States has any business dictating who can and cannot power their homes and buildings with nuclear power. Besides, it’s not that we’re particularly safe, anyway. After all, in the U.S., nearly half of our fleet of nuclear reactors is operating while being in full violation of fire safety regulations. And according to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the risk of reactor meltdown due to fire is estimated at about 50%.

No matter how you slice it, human error, lack of innovation and corporate-controlled governments will continue to eat away at the economic and safety credibility of nuclear power.

That doesn’t mean the nuclear power boom is going to end anytime soon. I’m quite certain the folks making decisions in China, India, South Korea and the Middle East don’t care what a loudmouth like me thinks. And that’s fine. But as someone who would like to see the earth continue to provide a safe home for future generations across the globe (not *just* Americans), I simply cannot champion nuclear power. At least not in its current form.

Consider this ...

In 2014, a professor from the Department of Nuclear Engineering at the University of California, Berkeley said the following...

“The cold truth is that, no matter what you do on the technological improvements side, accidents will occur – somewhere, someplace. The consequences of radiation release, contamination and evacuation of people is clear and obvious. That means governments and citizens should be prepared, not just nuclear utilities.”

Prepared for what?!

If the proverbial poop hits the fan, that's it. There's no safe exit plan. There's no magical translucent dome we can use to protect ourselves. And no matter how many times the government tells us everything is safe, I'm not buying it. Couple that with the fact that nuclear power in the United States is simply economically inferior without heavy subsidies, and it makes no sense to rely on it for future energy needs.

The End of Coal

In 2013, coal-loving politicians came out swinging after President Obama reminded the nation that he's got nothing to lose by pushing a new climate change agenda.

Analysts and overzealous treehuggers alike warned investors that the coal industry was doomed. Run, hide, scream into the distance –do whatever it takes to escape the clutches of an industry that's on the verge of ruin! The sky was falling and the sound of it all was deafening.

Conservative media used the opportunity to dust off its “Obama Declares War on Coal” headlines, and liberal media offered its disgustingly obligatory “atta boy” speech to legions of hyperactive liberal treehuggers who were still under the illusion that the President had any remaining credibility. Either way, it really made no difference because coal wasn't, and still is not, doomed.

The global demand for coal is not waning. In fact, it's growing quite rapidly. Look to the East and look to the West and you will see nations desperate to lock in long-term supplies of one of the most sought-after exports the United States has to offer: coal.

Today, there are about 1,200 new coal-fired power plants in pre-construction phases in 59 different countries. China and India are leading the way, but there are some other lesser-discussed European nations that are also not giving coal the cold shoulder.

Sure, this doesn't mean coal-fired power plants aren't being squeezed out of the U.S. marketplace. Truth is, in just five years, coal's total contribution to our energy mix fell from 48.5% to 37.4%. This was from 2007 to 2012. And by 2020, it is expected that coal will contribute less than 30%, with natural gas and alternatives picking up the difference. So the question is: Is this a result of an actual war on coal, or instead the very predictable results of a very disruptive market transformation? Or both?

There's no doubt that the EPA and the Obama administration have made few friends in the coal industry. With the President's second wind on his climate change agenda –coupled with new limits on coal-fired power plant emissions –it shouldn't be surprising that so many folks do, in fact, believe there is a war on coal in America. But it's much deeper than that.

Yes, this administration has made it very clear that it prefers to back natural gas and renewables over conventional coal-fired power generation. But even if the President does have it in for coal, shoulder chips and philosophical differences alone aren't enough to damage such a powerful industry. And while many of my environmentalist friends will scold me for my objectivity here, there is no doubt that coal's struggles are the result of both dirt-cheap natural gas *and* government pressure.

Greenpeace demonstrations and Al Gore movies aside, only a fool would believe the natural gas boom has not been the primary facilitator in the shunning of King Coal (although political and public pressure has also certainly served as an instigator). So no one should be surprised to see the U.S. coal industry so focused on exports these days. But even that, at some point, will come to an end.

The China Factor

Throughout the rest of this decade, U.S. coal suppliers will continue to do a very good business and generate significant revenue through exports. But by around 2025, even the export game could put further pressure on coal producers in the United States.

Last year, I was intrigued by a new study published by the analytics firm IHS. The report was called *Coal Rush: The Future of China's Coal Market*, and it detailed with very convincing data how raw coal demand from China will likely peak in 2025 at around 5.1 billion metric tons.

To put that into perspective, over the past ten years coal demand in China maintained a growth rate of about 10%. But based on that 5.1 billion metric tons figure, this slashes demand growth to about 2.4%. In the meantime –and likely to the dismay of those counting on explosive exports over the long-term–China's productive capacity for coal has not only increased by nearly four times, but it is also expected to continue this upward trend over the next few years.

IHS also notes that changes in transportation infrastructure disrupts the import/export paradigm even further, writing:

... transportation bottlenecks between domestic coal fields and demand centers emerged as a result of the rapid rise in coastal consumption, adding costs to delivered prices along the coast that helped make imports more competitive. IHS expects 800 million metric tons of new coal-carrying railway capacity to come online in the next five years, releasing currently “stranded” productive capacity to the market.

Based on IHS projections, import volumes will decrease rapidly from 2015 to 2020, due primarily to the combination of supply growth, demand moderation, and improved transportation. And if that weren't enough to pressure U.S. coal producers, fracking is expected

to gain some serious momentum in China, too.

According to IHS, China's own shale gas revolution is expected to begin in less than ten years. If China even gets close to the kind of success we've had here, U.S. coal exports could be slashed significantly. And make no mistake about it: billions are being wagered on China's fracking future.

Back in 2013, Shell announced it would invest more than \$1 billion a year to develop China's shale gas deposits. That's not peanuts and candy wrappers. And Shell is just one producer with skin in the game. Of course, anything can happen over the next few years. I'm not saying coal will ever reclaim its throne here in the United States, but to deny that coal has a place in our own domestic power production mix would be short-sighted – even from an environmental point of view.

Truth is, there are a number of very influential environmentalists that have recently changed their tunes on domestic coal-fired power generation. This is due to the fact that exporting it to China, where it's burned inefficiently (compared to power plants here), is actually *worse* for the environment than just keeping it within U.S. borders and burning it in regions where renewables tend to be less popular, like the Deep South.

Still, if you take the environmental angle out of the equation, coal is still destined to lose market share to natural gas and renewables. Natural gas is already much cheaper than coal, and in many parts of the country, wind and solar are already competitive with coal-fired power generation. Because both natural gas and renewables are complementary, coal doesn't have much of an advantage, except in certain parts of the country where there is a lack of natural gas or renewable energy resources. And those parts of the country are really few and far between. Even without renewable energy or natural gas subsidies, the end game is that coal's days as a major contributor to our energy economy are numbered. That's not to say coal won't continue to play a role, but that role will only get smaller and smaller going forward.

Wishing Away Reality

The truth is, looking forward, the growth prospects for renewables are much more optimistic than the growth prospects for fossil fuels. Economically speaking, any finite resource will always become more expensive to produce and consume over time. Sure, we still have an enormous amount of oil and gas under our feet. There's still plenty of uranium we can use to fuel our nuclear power plants and there's more than enough coal to easily last us throughout the century. The key, however, is the cost to produce this stuff.

Oil and gas in particular are becoming more and more costly to produce. This is a fact, and this is a reality that cannot be wished away. Meanwhile, new, cleaner sources of electricity and transportation fuels are enjoying rapid cost reductions and integration all across the globe.

By 2030, I suspect the U.S. energy economy to be much more diversified, with utility-scale solar and distributed solar gaining the most market share in the West, coal generation maintaining in the South and Midwest (but falling drastically in other parts of the country), wind in the Midwest and offshore wind on the East Coast gaining steam, and, peppered throughout the nation, decentralized power and microgrids popping up in small communities. Natural gas will run all over the Lower 48 and Alaska.

This kind of generation portfolio will ultimately enable a decrease in carbon emissions while strengthening our overall energy mix with plenty of much-needed diversification –a win-win-win for consumers, national security, and environmentalists.

Let the Market Work

In the United States, our transportation infrastructure is almost entirely dependent upon oil, which accounts for about 90% of our transportation needs. As an environmentalist, this is a reality that is difficult to comprehend when considering the magnitude of a transition that would have to take place in order to get our society off of oil. But as a realist, it's better to understand that the end of oil will never come by choice; it'll only come by market forces.

As I mentioned earlier in this section, despite an avalanche of domestic oil that is now being produced in North America, it'll never be enough to keep pace with demand. So, as one who believes it is always in our best interests to prepare for the future, steps should be taken today to ensure that when oil becomes too cost prohibitive to produce, the global economy won't come to a screeching halt. Fortunately, market forces will always keep such a thing from happening. The question is, how will it play out?

Corn in Your Gas Tank

Some folks believe homegrown ethanol is the solution. They are wrong –particularly those who believe that ethanol mandates laid down by the government have already accomplished a reduction in gas prices. As if gas prices are actually high.

Truth is, drivers in the United States enjoy some of the cheapest gas prices in the developed world. At least that's the illusion. However, the price at the pump does not directly reflect the cost of production, distribution and consumption. If you really dive into what we're shelling out in tax dollars through a myriad of nonsensical tax breaks and military costs (including human lives on the battlefield), we pay an extraordinary amount to fill up. Even with a wealth of new domestic oil flowing from beneath our feet, we will continue to pay a great price for the convenience of a well-established oil-centric world. This isn't a criticism, by the way, but merely an observation of truth.

So instead of asking the question, “How do we reduce gas prices?” perhaps a better question is, “How do we responsibly reduce gasoline reliance?”

The Oil Market is a Global One

Make no mistake; our reliance on gasoline and diesel will continue well throughout the rest of the century. Even with the flood of ethanol being released into the market and the rapid development of electric vehicles, our cars and trucks will continue to be primarily fueled by gasoline and diesel.

And this holds true for the rest of the world, too –especially in China and India.

Sure, the United States is swimming in a bounty of unconventional oil these days. But the oil market is a global one. And despite the common misconception by way too many folks in this nation, we are *not* the only country on earth.

Bottom line: If you believe gasoline is going to get cheaper, you’re in for an unpleasant surprise.

War Has Been Declared!

Now, the folks over at the American Coalition for Ethanol will tell you it is corn-based ethanol that can save us from high gas prices.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

In fact, while ethanol advocates rant and rave about the economic benefits of ethanol, they rarely discuss how much of your hard-earned cash is being pilfered by way of exorbitant subsidies for the Big Ag machine, which irresponsibly grows an abundance of corn with dangerous pesticides and GMO concoctions that are also heavily subsidized by you, dear taxpayer.

Cheap ethanol? Not a chance. There’s nothing cheap about a fuel that requires government welfare and the decimation of our natural resources.

And certainly the mere idea of dumping food into our fuel tanks while people are going hungry in this country and around the globe is not only unethical –it’s downright criminal.

But that doesn’t matter to the peddlers of corn ethanol.

In fact, at a recent Fuel Ethanol Workshop, CEO of biofuel pusher BBI International Mike Bryan told a crowd of enthusiastic supporters that the ethanol industry was at war, primarily with the

oil industry.

I don't know about you, but if there's a "war" going on here, it's between a welfare-supported ethanol industry and lots of pissed-off taxpayers.

In any event, ethanol isn't going to make the cost of fueling your vehicle any cheaper.

So back to the real question: How do you responsibly reduce gasoline reliance?

Ethanol, the Enabler

It's actually not that difficult.

In fact, we're already starting to make some headway — albeit somewhat minor at this point — in actively making progress on reducing gasoline and diesel consumption today:

- Increased production and demand of fuel-efficient vehicles
- Rapid development of electric and plug-in electric vehicles
- Increased ridership and expansion of mass transit
- The integration of natural gas-powered trucks and buses

My friends, those are real solutions –not ethanol. In fact, ethanol actually stretches our gasoline supplies, which may seem like a good thing on the surface, but only serves to prolong our continued reliance on heavily-subsidized fuels.

That's not a solution. That's an enabling problem.

What \$54 Billion Buys You

In 2011, the U.S. Senate rejected bills to end billions in ethanol subsidies. That vote went down with a 40-59 vote. Most votes *against* ending this particular ethanol subsidy came from Democrats –although despite Oklahoma Senator Tom Coburn announcing that Senate Democrats killed the measure, 13 of his fellow Republicans also voted against the bill. (Not surprisingly, these were mostly senators from corn-producing states)

For the sake of clarification, this subsidy – known as the Volumetric Ethanol Excise Tax Credit (VEETC) – was initially designed to provide incentives for fuel suppliers to blend ethanol with gasoline. But since suppliers were already required to do so under the 2007 Renewable Fuel Standard, taxpayers ended up paying these guys to do nothing more than follow what was

already a nonsensical law. If this is how we're doing things now, then I want the government to send me a fat check every month for obeying the speed limit.

U.S. taxpayers have ponied up roughly \$54 billion in ethanol subsidies since 2005. And those who supported the VEETC told the tale of how this subsidy ultimately benefits the consumer by lowering gas prices. But they never bothered to mention that government-subsidized ethanol production also increases the cost of your food.

Sure, high food prices are not the result of just ethanol production. Bad weather, increased demand, and high oil prices all play a role. But as the USDA admittedly pointed out on a number of occasions, past tight corn supplies have been the result of not only bad weather, but also the increase in corn being used for ethanol production.

In the United States, 35% of corn in the growing season ending in 2010 went to the production of biofuels. In 2013, it reached about 38%. In what universe does it make sense to allow a transportation fuel to monopolize nearly 40% of your primary food crop –particularly a fuel used to power an outdated internal combustion engine? Sorry, but this is one consumer who would happily pay a few extra pennies at the pump if it meant we could end these ridiculous subsidies, especially since corn-based ethanol isn't quite as "green" as some would lead you to believe...

What Cows Eat

In 2013, the U.S. experienced its worst drought in more than 50 years. Crops were wiped out, farms went under, and herds of cattle and pigs were destroyed because there simply wasn't enough low-cost feed available to keep them alive.

Of course, if you really want to dive into the issue, the fact that we continue to feed our cows things neither God nor evolution ever intended them to eat places the burden of blame on our shoulders. If we'd chose to shun the centralized industrial farming machine and embrace local farmers that let their cows and pigs graze on grasses and other natural feedstock (pigs love acorns, roots, and bugs) as mother nature dictates, the lack of corn and soy would not have nearly the impact it had on our overall food supply in 2012. But sadly, that's not how we do things now.

These days nearly all cattle and pigs raised for human consumption are fed steady diets of industrially-grown corn and soy. So when the drought hit with all the subtlety of a brick to the face, we found ourselves in quite a jam. And thanks to a government-mandated renewable fuels standard that requires 36 billion gallons of renewable fuel be used per year by 2022, that summer's drought crisis was actually amplified.

Waiver Denied!

Despite an avalanche of requests from Midwestern states and meat industry groups to waive ethanol mandates during that drought, the EPA said it had not found evidence to support a finding of severe economic harm that would warrant granting a waiver.

According to the National Drought Mitigation Center, damage estimates from the drought of 2012 were as high as \$150 billion. And these numbers continued to rise as more than half of the nation (58%) got battered by drought conditions.

The EPA was negligent to the point of criminality on this one. The organization that is charged with environmental protection did *the exact opposite* by maintaining the renewable fuels standard during a drought crisis. And make no mistake about it; this was, and continues to be a crisis. Meanwhile, this ethanol scam has never produced the environmental benefits that were once promised.

One More Con

No matter how you slice it, ethanol has been nothing less than a generous gift to Big Ag. And thus far, they've managed to pilfer tens of billions of tax dollars from this racket –all under the guise of energy security and the environment.

The energy security claim is laughable at best. How “secure” are we when we forfeit our food to fill our tanks? You want some energy security? Phase out the antiquated internal combustion engine. And don't even get me started on the moral issues surrounding using arable land to grow fuel instead of food. If you've ever needed an example of blatant human arrogance, look no further than the misuse of our soil and water.

As far as the environmental benefits are concerned –well, those are questionable. We already know of the environmental stress conventional corn-based ethanol production places on our planet. And in 2014, a study published in the journal *Nature Climate Change* found that non-conventional, advanced biofuels derived from corn stover emit more carbon dioxide than gasoline. This report, by the way, was released around the same time the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released a study that found some biofuels are now releasing indirect emissions that actually contribute to total emissions that are worse than those coming from gasoline and diesel.

In the future, I suspect we'll continue to see more and more studies suggesting that the integration of ethanol – particularly as a result of government force – will prove to not only be one of the biggest economic burdens taxpayers have ever had to bear, but also a massive environmental burden that will result in the rape of what's left of our healthy soil and water. It's a

tragedy of epic proportions, and the folks so many of us vote for have facilitated and profited off of this tragedy.

Driving on Electrons

Often vilified by conservative analysts and reporters, electric cars have long been targets for significant criticism. I take issue with this. Certainly I'll never fault anyone for pointing out the fact that government subsidies have played a major role in putting drivers behind the seats of electric cars. This is a valid issue journalists *should* expose, just as they should also expose any government subsidy that tilts the energy market in favor of one industry over another. But criticizing the technology and the vehicles, just because it seems like the thing to do if you're a conservative is, for lack of a better word, stupid.

The truth is, today's electric vehicles aren't the glorified golf carts of the past. Instead, they look just like any other modern-day car but offer the advantages of increased economic and environmental sustainability. With all-electric ranges of commercially available electric cars running as high as 300 miles per charge, more than 70% of the daily U.S. commuting population can use an electric car without the need to buy a single drop of gasoline or diesel, as these folks travel no more than 40 miles per day. And environmentally, electric cars simply come out ahead compared to internal combustion vehicles.

Some will argue that this is not possible, due to the fact that these vehicles are charged on a grid that relies so heavily on coal. However, even with today's coal-fired power plants emitting greenhouse gases, overall levels are reduced because the entire process of moving a car one mile is more efficient using electricity than producing gasoline and burning it in a car's engine. And of course, as many of the older coal-fired power plants retire, natural gas and newer solar and wind farms and geothermal power plants will gradually move in to pick up some of that slack, thereby increasing the amount of cleaner energy being sent to the grid.

I would also argue that economically, in many cases, electric cars are superior. Assuming you fall into the 70% of daily commuters driving no more than 40 miles per day, and assuming you don't live in a region or have a job where a four-wheel drive truck is necessary, it's cheaper to shun gasoline for electricity. Of course, again, this is in the absence of government intervention.

If the price at the pump correlated to the true cost of gasoline or diesel –without both direct and indirect subsidies –you'd be shelling out at least double what you're paying today. And even if you leave those subsidies in there, the price of gasoline and diesel is only going to continue to rise going forward. Sure, there will be a few peaks and valleys along the way, but don't think for a second that you'll be paying anything less than \$6.00 a gallon by 2020 –at which time, the cost to produce electric vehicles will have decreased dramatically thanks to improvements in battery chemistries, design, and economies of scale.

Finally, it must be noted that there are also real national security benefits of utilizing home-grown electricity over oil. While it is true that more and more of our oil is coming from within the United States, as I've mentioned before, oil is a global market. Any disruption in oil supplies, whether it's in North Dakota or Saudi Arabia will have a negative effect on our economy.

Over the long haul, electric cars will prove to be viable competition with internal combustion vehicles. And between the environmental, economic and national security benefits, it really is a no-brainer to support the development of this industry. That doesn't mean supporting the siphoning of tax dollars to promote it, but it does mean setting aside this ridiculous notion that conservative values are not aligned with the success of the electric car. Nothing could be further from the truth. And from a libertarian perspective, the ability to utilize a vehicle that offers the benefit of self-reliance (as it's much easier to produce electricity than it is to make gasoline), is a definite plus.

Chapter 3

You are What You Eat

“This magical, marvelous food on our plate, this sustenance we absorb, has a story to tell. It has a journey. It leaves a footprint. It leaves a legacy. To eat with reckless abandon, without conscience, without knowledge; folks, this ain’t normal.”

– Joel Salatin

The Food Police

In March of 2013, New York State Supreme Court Judge Milton Tingling ruled that regulations proposed by New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg to ban cups or containers of sugary drinks larger than 16 ounces were fraught with arbitrary and capricious consequences.

Tingling noted the regulations couldn’t be enforced evenly, as they wouldn’t pertain to supermarkets and convenience stores regulated by the state. He added that such regulations would not only violate the separation of powers doctrine but would also eviscerate it. I couldn’t have agreed more. However, it didn’t take long for Bloomberg to announce he would appeal the decision, saying, “It would be irresponsible not to try to do everything we can to save lives.”

The Enemy of Obesity is a Free Market

You know the old proverb: *The road to hell is paved with good intentions.*

Certainly I applaud any citizen who wants to help save American lives. And to deny that the ridiculously high consumption of sugary drinks in this country has contributed to our very real obesity epidemic would be naïve. But let’s cut the crap. It’s not the sugary drinks that are making people sick, it’s the individuals who drink them. And the fact is if some of these overzealous lawmakers took the time to embrace free market solutions instead of dictating arbitrary regulations, we wouldn’t even need to have this conversation. Make no mistake about it; regulating beverage containers isn’t going to do a damn thing to combat obesity and “save lives.”

As author Michael Pollan pointed out in his book *In Defense of Food*, the rise in obesity in America began around 1980, when an avalanche of cheap calories began to flow from American farms prompted by the Nixon-era changes in agricultural policy.

Pollan goes on to say:

American farmers produced 600 more calories per person per day in 2000 than they did in 1980. But some calories got cheaper than others: Since 1980, the price of sweeteners and added fats (most of them derived, respectively, from subsidized corn and subsidized soybeans), dropped 20 percent, while the price of fresh fruits and vegetables increased by 40 percent. It is the cheaper and less healthful of these two kinds of calories on which Americans have been gorging.

These are precisely the kinds of calories found in convenience food — snacks, microwavable entrees, soft drinks, and packaged food of all kinds — which happens to be the source of most of the 300 or so extra calories Americans have added to their daily diet since 1980.

Bottom line: Cheap food results in folks eating a lot more of it. Of course, it's not *really* cheap.

Sure, that soda may not cost you more than a couple of bucks at the convenience store, but through your tax dollars, you're also paying to prop up the corn producers that supply the "cheap" corn syrup that allows your soda to be sold at a price that does not represent the true cost to produce it. You also get to shell out a few bucks to cover those uninsured folks who don't pay their bills after going to the hospital to be treated for illnesses resulting from obesity and diabetes.

It's pretty simple, really...

If any of these lawmakers really want to step up and propose the kind of legislation that would result in a decrease in obesity and diabetes rates, they would be wise to start with the farm bill –gutting the free ride for Big Ag and enabling a real free market to dictate the price we pay for food. And on a local and state level, folks like Michael Bloomberg should be removing regulatory barriers to help incentivize grocery stores and farmers markets to set up shop in food deserts.

According to the *American Journal of Preventative Medicine*, the nation's highest rates of obesity are in regions where there are no large supermarkets. These regions, also known as food deserts, are oases for fast food restaurants and convenience stores, but lack real food stores that sell fresh fruits and vegetables (which, if you ask any registered dietitian, are staples of a healthy diet).

Truth is if you really want to fix the obesity problem in this country, which places a huge financial burden on taxpayers, you must support free market efforts that enable Americans to make responsible food purchasing decisions. Now, I'm not saying that setting up grocery stores and farmers markets in food deserts will magically lure all those folks to the fruit and vegetable aisles, but at least the option would exist. And that, without a doubt, would do a lot more than outlawing 32-ounce sodas. As well, it would help bolster economic growth and revitalize American neighborhoods that are plagued by unemployment.

Of course, it seems to be much easier for lawmakers to force restrictive laws on citizens than it is to nurture free market solutions. And when they're not conjuring up new ways to restrict your freedom, their busy pilfering your paychecks to make sure Big Ag gets its share of the take.

Taxes, Tyranny and Toxic Slop

“Another successful effort by the Obama administration that boosts the bottom line for farmers!”

Those are the words Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack proclaimed to reporters after news hit that Japan was ready to ease restrictions on beef imports from the United States. Of course, what Vilsack failed to mention in his pep rally speech was that the only good news was for the big dog agriculture lobbyists who regularly roam the halls of Congress. Despite the images they try to create in their press releases, it's *not* the local family farmer who's going to benefit from this deal; it's the operators of those highly-destructive concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFO) that'll be on the receiving end of this hundred-million-dollar score.

That's right –the heavily-subsidized industrial farming industry won big, while U.S. citizens enjoyed little more than the opportunity to swim around in even more of the toxic slop these operations produce. Polluted water and infectious disease outbreaks are the gifts that keep on giving. And my question is, when Vilsack was doing his happy dance, where were the tree-hugging Obama supporters? Didn't it bother them that their tax dollars were continuing to get funneled into these operations?

Remembering Mad Cow

According to the Union of Concerned Scientists, taxpayers pony up about \$7 billion a year to subsidize or clean up after these CAFOs, and that doesn't include another \$4.1 billion that's been spent over the years to control leaking manure storage facilities. And let's not forget the reason Japan put the kibosh on U.S. beef imports to begin with was because of fears over bovine spongiform encephalopathy, better known as mad cow disease.

If you want to trace the origins of mad cow, look no further than the CAFOs that fed their cows rendered cattle and chicken feces. They basically turned their herbivores into carnivores, and the result was catastrophic from both a public health *and* economic perspective. But that's just the tip of the iceberg.

According to a study published by researchers at Purdue University, there are now concerns that manure generated by CAFOs could result in infectious disease outbreaks in surrounding communities. And let me remind you again: Your tax dollars keep these operations humming, even as they increase output to meet heightened demand in other parts of the world. This, my friends, is why I try to buy my meat from local farmers who treat their cows with respect, and

allow them to eat what God intended them to eat: grass!

Sure, it costs me a few more bucks. Because unlike those big industrial farms, these local farmers don't get to suck from the government teat. They don't have access to those billion-dollar subsidies, so they have to endure the real cost of production. Imagine that! Still, it's worth it. The meat tastes much better, and it's loaded with more of the vitamins and minerals you can't get from those industrially-produced cows.

Numerous studies (not funded by Big Ag) have shown grass-fed beef is:

- Lower in total fat
- Higher in beta-carotene
- Higher in vitamin E
- Higher in the minerals calcium, magnesium, and potassium
- Higher in total omega-3s
- Able to boast a healthier ratio of omega-6 to omega-3 fatty acids
- Higher in CLA, a potential cancer fighter
- Higher in vaccenic acid, which can be transformed into CLA
- Lower in the saturated fats linked with heart disease

Yes, when you allow cows to be cows –and not secluded, cannibalistic, soulless widgets –you are rewarded with nutritionally superior sustenance. Of course, not all cows shoved into CAFOs are forced to eat meat. Many are fed a steady diet of corn and soy which (surprise, surprise) is nearly all sourced from other industrial farms that *also* land billions in taxpayer subsidies every single year.

How long are we expected to shell out our hard-earned money to these industrial agriculture giants? The way I see it, if you can't operate competitively without my tax dollars, then your business model is inferior. In a real free market, one must ask, shouldn't healthy competition dictate which farms prosper and which farms fail? Of course, to assume we have a free market when it comes to farming is naïve.

The bottom line is that while Obama's yes-man over at the Department of Agriculture was rewarding his boss for getting Japan to buy more U.S. meat, the hard-working family farmer that doesn't receive those fat subsidy checks from the government is living honorably and producing quality food for Americans. He is doing right by the land, right by the consumer, and right by the taxpayer. He is the one that should be congratulated for maintaining a sense of normalcy and responsibility to food production. And he's the one that should be supported by those who

have had enough of government interference in what's supposed to be a free market economy.

As Libertarian organic farmer Joel Salatin once said in regards to “clean food,”

... Whenever I hear people say clean food is expensive, I tell them it's actually the cheapest food you can buy. That always gets their attention. Then I explain that with our food, all of the costs are figured into the prices. Society is not bearing the cost of water pollution, of antibiotic resistance, of food-borne illnesses, of crop subsidies, of subsidized oil and water — of all the hidden costs to the environment and the taxpayer that makes cheap food seem cheap. No thinking person will tell you they don't care about all that. I tell them the choice is simple: You can buy honestly priced food or you can buy irresponsibly priced food.

Amen!

Outlawing Victory Gardens

In an effort to reduce pressure on the public food supply during World War II, 20 million Americans planted victory gardens, growing everything from potatoes and corn to beans and carrots. These folks were considered patriots.

Today we are once again starting to see a victory garden movement appear in our cities and towns. It's a beautiful thing to see once-abandoned lots turned into vibrant gardens where locals grow and harvest their own tomatoes, collard greens and onions. To see people growing herbs on their back porches or fresh cucumbers in five-gallon buckets. Even in the suburbs, I've seen folks transition grass lawns into beautiful vegetable gardens.

Some people are growing their own food these days for ethical reasons. I certainly applaud that. But I suspect many of these gardens are a result of pressure on public food supplies due to extreme weather conditions, costly biofuel mandates, and high oil prices.

Unfortunately, there are some lawmakers who don't seem too interested in supporting such patriotic endeavors anymore –and in fact, actually go out of their way to dissuade hard-working Americans from growing their own food to feed their families.

Your Garden is Illegal

Back in 2011, a woman by the name of Julie Bass, from Oak Park, Michigan, was moments away from being thrown in jail for 93 days. Her crime? In an effort to feed her family during tough economic times, she refused to take a government handout in the form of food stamps and started growing her own food, which would ultimately help her provide nourishment for eight

people. Her reward? Some random bureaucrat told her a vegetable garden was not what people in the neighborhood wanted to see in a front yard, and pointed to a city code that stated front yards have to have suitable live plant material. He explained the garden was not suitable, stating:

If you look at the definition of what “suitable” is in Webster’s Dictionary, it will say common. So, if you look around and you look in any other community, what’s common to a front yard is a nice grass yard with beautiful trees and bushes and flowers.

And here’s the bizarre thing: In July 2011, Oak Park, Michigan, was so strapped for cash that authorities had to cancel the town’s Independence Day fireworks display to save money. They also had to cut the town’s workweek down to four days. Yet somehow they found the time to ticket, fine, and prosecute an American citizen who decided to grow vegetables to help feed her family.

Can you imagine if things were like this back when folks were planting victory gardens during WWII?

Fortunately, Oak Park dropped the charges against Bass –but the tyrannous attack on Americans that have the audacity to plant gardens on their own property didn’t end with Bass.

They’ll Steal Your Food

Jason Helvingston lives in Orlando, Florida, where he grows beans, radishes, and chard in his front yard. And while not a single neighbor has ever complained, another government worker told Helvingston that his garden didn’t meet some “code” that requires a “finished appearance.”

Basically, they want the visual appeal of grass –not sustenance. So, they demanded the vegetable garden be destroyed. Thankfully, Helvingston didn’t give in. He told the city they’d have to take his house before they took his garden. He even collected more than 200 signatures from his community expressing support for the garden and requesting the city change its decision.

Then there’s Denise Morrison, from Tulsa, OK. Morrison once had more than 100 plant varieties in her yard, all of which were edible and had a purpose. But city workers told her the garden was in violation of a city code –and *without warning*, they violently destroyed her garden. Not only was this a blatant attack on her Fourth Amendment rights, but it also resulted in Morrison losing her plants –which, at the time, were her livelihood as they served as both food and medicine while she was unemployed.

Morrison didn’t want a handout, food stamps, or sympathy; she only wanted the ability to provide for herself and not be a burden to others. Sadly, this is a way of life few people

understand today –yet it is an honorable one that could lift this nation from despair if we collectively embraced it.

The bottom line is that as a culture, we really don't respect food anymore. We don't understand what it takes to produce it. We don't respect the farmers who provide it. Many don't even know where their food actually comes from. We're no longer connected to our food, and that is not only a tragedy but also a very dangerous situation. It's one of the reasons so many people in this nation are so wasteful.

Cheap food as a result of government meddling has further enabled a system that thrives on over-reliance on the government. It has allowed so many of us to look the other way while government-funded agriculture companies destroy our once-healthy and vibrant soil with fuel crops. It has helped flood the market with empty calories and nutrient-deficient food, thereby helping to enable an obesity epidemic. And it has tricked many into believing that the government's actions are altruistic and in place to make life easier for Americans. But all it's done is make us fat, lazy, and apathetic.

PART II

Domestic Warfare

Chapter 4

The War on Poverty

Resolve not to be poor: whatever you have, spend less. Poverty is a great enemy to human happiness; it certainly destroys liberty, and it makes some virtues impracticable, and others extremely difficult.

–Samuel Johnson

Who Wants to be Poor?

Poverty is not a genetically inherited trait. Just because you are born into poverty does not mean you will live in poverty throughout your life. Certainly there are plenty of examples of folks who were dealt the poverty hand early on, but were able to break the chains of poverty through hard work and determination. Still, tens of millions continue to live in conditions that are not synonymous with the American dream.

Here are some very telling numbers from a 2012 U.S. Census report...

- 46.5 million people in the United States live in poverty.
- 6.6% of the U.S. population (20.4 million people) live in deep poverty, –i.e.) with income 50% below the poverty line.
- 21.8% of children under 18 (16.1 million children), live below the poverty line.
- The poverty rate for the disabled in the U.S. (aged 18 – 64) was 28.4% (4.3 million people).

Being that we are still the wealthiest nation on the planet, this can be hard to stomach. But perhaps we need to define poverty before we go any further in this chapter.

What is Poverty?

Poverty is typically defined as the state of having little or no money, goods, or means of support. At least that's how I'll discuss it in this chapter. However, what we may identify as poverty in this country could actually be identified as something completely different in another.

For instance, a Syrian refugee forced from his home by war now lives in a makeshift refugee camp with his family. He lives on meager rations, his children have no access to education or basic medical care, and they have no idea when they'll be able to return home, assuming they'll

ever be able to.

Or consider a woman in sub-Saharan Africa who walks four miles through a blazing desert every morning to collect water for her family, all while eluding thieves, rapists and slave traders. Her children have never attended school, and books are rare treasures.

For these folks, I imagine they would be more than happy to trade *their* lives with those of poverty-stricken Americans. After all, even in poverty, many Americans still have access to clean water, education, food, clothing, and basic medical supplies.

Now, I'm not suggesting poverty-stricken Americans should be content because of access to these things. In fact, to suggest such a thing would be ridiculous, especially considering the fact that I've personally never lived in an environment where I didn't have a hot meal, clean clothes and a roof over my head. But there is a point that needs to be addressed here, and all of us, rich or poor, should consider it before diving into a debate about poverty and public welfare.

In many parts of the world, if you don't have access to food, clean water, basic medical supplies and clothing –you die. It's that simple. In the United States, however, for the most part, public welfare programs can help at least ensure that you have the ability to continue to survive and even climb your way out of poverty if you so choose. This being the case, why are so many Americans still living in poverty, particularly when the safety net of public welfare is available?

To answer this question, we must first identify those who temporarily utilize public welfare programs while living in poverty and those who continuously utilize public welfare programs while living in poverty.

The Root of the Problem

There are two types of welfare recipients in the United States: Those who utilize charitable and government-funded resources to provide temporary assistance due to a job loss, major economic hardship or serious health issue, and those who utilize those same resources, not as temporary assistance, but as a form of sustenance.

Now while I certainly think of myself as a free-market kind of guy, I have no problem helping out fellow Americans during tough times. Certainly it's not something that should be dictated by a centralized government, but I don't necessarily think it's such a horrible thing to look out for our American brothers and sisters. To do so is honorable, virtuous and noble.

That being said, those who misuse charitable and government-funded resources –basically living their entire lives off of others –well, they have chosen to live in poverty. And this is where we see the root of the problem.

Real Hardship

It would be naïve to suggest that we're all born on equal footing. We are not. Some of us are born into poverty, some of us are born into middle-class households and some of us are born into wealth. But along the way, we decide how we choose to live.

Those living in poverty now may have valid reasons for hardship. Certainly social, geographical and racial obstacles are very real and should not be trivialized. However, what often seems to separate those who choose poverty over prosperity boils down to drive and motivation. Even with great obstacles in their way, there are many successful Americans who once faced the same, if not more challenging obstacles.

Take Starbucks' CEO Howard Schultz who grew up in the projects, or Oprah Winfrey who was born into an extremely poor family in Mississippi. George Soros, the billionaire investor survived the Nazi occupation of Hungary and went on to become one of the wealthiest individuals on the planet, and Madam C. J. Walker, a woman born to former slaves, launched a hair care business in the late 1800s and eventually became a millionaire.

The bottom line is that those who do not possess the necessary drive and motivation to escape poverty will simply be condemned to live in it. And this is a reality that we must accept: the reality that you can never fully eliminate poverty, and to attempt to do so is an exercise in futility. So when lawmakers speak of new programs designed to end poverty, those programs will ultimately fail because not everyone has the drive, motivation or even the desire to abandon a life of poverty.

That being said, there are also plenty of Americans who do want to end the cycle of poverty in their own lives. They want better lives for themselves and for their children, and they're willing to work for it. So is it wrong to want to offer these folks a helping hand? I don't think it is. In fact, as Americans, we should take great joy in our ability to help other Americans who aren't looking for hand out, but instead a hand up. As well, for those born into poverty, I believe it's a very honorable endeavor to ensure that those American children are looked after if their own parents are unable or unfit to do the job.

Yes, I realize many will argue that it is not the job of the taxpayer to help look after these kids. It is the job of the parents. But there's no denying the fact that many parents simply cannot meet some very basic needs of their children. We could argue all day as to the reasons for this, but none of that matters to a newborn who isn't getting proper nutrition or access to basic health care. I just don't believe it's right to abandon young Americans this way. But should we as Americans be forced by the government to "do the right thing?"

While I don't believe the government should force any of us to pony up for someone else's child, I do believe it is our patriotic duty to step up when others can't. I also believe that while the

current welfare system in this country is incredibly flawed, a completely revamped system of temporary welfare – one that is operated by individual states instead of the federal government – benefits all of us over the long-term. It does us no good to look the other way while children suffer.

What About the Kids?

I've always been a fan of the get something/give something attitude. For example, if an American citizen loses his job and needs some temporary welfare assistance, then it should be traded for something –perhaps some form of community service, for instance.

If I was down on my luck and needed a few extra bucks to survive, I certainly wouldn't turn it down if it required me to spend two hours a day picking up trash in my community or walking a neighborhood watch shift. Not only does this keep welfare from being nothing more than a “throw money at the problem” solution, but it also helps the individual get engaged in his community, thereby adding value to that community and the individual.

For children that are born into poverty, well, I believe children should not be penalized for the disadvantages or mistakes of their parents. Yet ponying up more welfare to adults that continue to have children they cannot afford doesn't seem like a wise use of that money, either. Quite frankly, this seems to be one of the reasons the government continues to throw so much money into what really amounts to generational welfare money pits. However, we are still forced to confront the question: What about the kids?

We know there are certain things our children need. Access to basic health care, nutrition, education and recreational activities top my list. Unfortunately, many poverty-stricken parents cannot deliver on these needs. But with the assistance of the private sector, it would be possible to at least help provide for those in poverty who are guilty of nothing more than being born into a bad situation.

Private/public partnerships are nothing new, and can be quite effective at combating a number of social and economic problems. While I would never charge the government alone with the responsibility of something like this, I believe community-based facilities that can provide basic health care, nutrition, education and recreation for children would make for a much better use of tax dollars than just issuing monthly checks. In fact, if done right, I would be willing to bet that some of these facilities, particularly those with strong community support, could operate profitably, thereby eliminating the need for government altogether.

Now I admit, this potential “solution” lacks specifics, and as I mentioned at the start of this book, these suggestions are merely meant to be conversation-starters. But the concepts of limited welfare programs at the state level –requiring welfare recipients to pay into the system, even while they are utilizing it –and involving the private sector are not only possible, but really just

seem like no-brainers.

As Americans, we shouldn't want to enable the continuation of a broken welfare system or support those who seek only to leech from hard-working taxpayers. However, we should also not be so quick to abandon less-fortunate Americans by making it even harder for those seeking to break the chains of poverty. As well, we shouldn't always be so quick to condemn those on welfare programs as freeloaders and bums. There are plenty of Americans out there who only seek to utilize welfare programs out of temporary necessity. It should also be understood that while it makes for great hyperbole, not every American on welfare is abusing the program. In fact, it's actually corporate welfare that poses a much larger burden for taxpayers and that is incredibly ripe with scandal and abuse.

Government Failures

In 2012, the U.S. government spent nearly \$50 billion on public welfare programs. These included things like food assistance, low-income housing, and financial aid. That's not chump change. However, it's considerably lower than the roughly \$100 billion that was funneled into corporate welfare programs.

Of course, some will claim that corporate welfare (i.e. –business subsidies), is required to help U.S. companies compete in the global marketplace. But budget analyst Tad DeHaven from the CATO Institute cleared the dust from this smokescreen in CATO's July 25, 2012 Policy Analysis when he wrote...

“...corporate welfare often subsidizes failing and mismanaged businesses and induces firms to spend more time on lobbying rather than on making better products. Instead of correcting market failures, federal subsidies misallocate resources and introduce government failures into the marketplace.”

“Corporate welfare doesn't aid economic growth and it is an affront to America's constitutional principles of limited government and equality under the law.”

A Perfect Scenario

Corporate welfare spans various industries and sectors, although some industries tend to get better treatment than others. The finance industry, in particular has been the recipient of massive amounts of filthy lucre. Big Ag and the energy industry have also received billions of tax dollars in an effort to prop up sectors that are economically unviable without the help of Uncle Sam. And again, this is to the tune of \$100 billion annually.

Now I'm not sharing this with you in an effort to dismiss the \$50 billion a year we spend on

public welfare programs. In fact, I continue to believe that current public welfare programs in place are highly flawed and contribute to a serious drain on our economy and our overall society. However, if we truly desire to end this debilitating trend of enabling decades-long welfare cases, we must re-examine the entire spectrum of welfare. We must be honest about who's gaming the system in the worst possible way and who's facilitating the most egregious offenses. And we must not be so quick to penalize those Americans who are faced with poverty, sometimes due in part to government incompetence. Because yes, not every American faced with poverty needs economic assistance due to a self-imposed financial crisis. There are plenty of folks out there who did everything right. They played by the rules only to get the rug pulled out from under them by self-serving politicians and the corporations that fill their campaign coffers.

Look, if we truly want to reduce poverty in this country, we must first accept the fact that not everyone will break the chains of poverty. We must also recognize that welfare cannot be indefinite, and must be accompanied by some type of benefit for the taxpayers. Whether it's temporary incentives for businesses or temporary financial assistance for individual citizens, we must not provide a single penny unless we can validate an acceptable return on that investment. And leaving something like that up to the sole discretion of the government would be a huge mistake.

The perfect scenario would be that the government would not be involved in any of this. But until that "perfect scenario" can be a reality, we must work within the confines of a broken system in order to fix it. I realize this may counter basic Libertarian thought, where there is an immediate call to end welfare. But I do believe it is unsafe to assume that in order to end a broken welfare system, you can do it without an organized transition *away* from that system.

It's taken decades to get to where we are today, with flawed public welfare and very dangerous corporate welfare. To move away from these damaging policies, we must support phasing them out in a logical and rational manner. Whether it's removing tax and regulatory barriers for business owners or developing public/private partnerships that can help the jobless gain relevant skills that'll enable steady employment when the well runs dry, it only makes sense to implement these transitional goals for the sake of long-term success and the elimination of a broken welfare system.

Food Stamp Lunacy

While there are certainly folks who truly fight to rise up out of poverty every single day, there are others that are simply opportunists looking to milk the system. Many don't even need government assistance, but use it anyway because they've been too pampered all their lives to know what it really means to be poor.

Take Brian McBride, for instance, an associate producer at CNN who once wrote a piece about how he paid off his \$26,500 debt in less than two years. The article started off with:

It took less than two years to save up that cash. During that time I became a pro bargain shopper, tested my limits with expiring foods and briefly resorted to using food stamps.

So basically, he, like most Americans these days looked for deals at the supermarket. How inventive!

He tested his limits with expiring foods.

Talk to more than half the people in Baltimore, and you'll find plenty of folks who would gratefully take some expired foods off your hands.

And he briefly resorted to using food stamps. Because even with bargain shopping and eating foods that have gone beyond their expiration dates, he still needed Uncle Sam to fork over a few bucks.

Although he did a great job of patting himself on the back, McBride didn't deserve a single second of applause for what he thought was some kind of major accomplishment. Am I supposed to be impressed that he went bargain shopping and sucked a little off the government teat?

No one told this guy to take out \$20,000 in school loans. So why did taxpayers have to throw him a few bucks for food while he so proudly tried to pay down his debt in two years?

Back in My Day

When I first graduated from college, I worked two jobs, ate my fair share of bargain tuna and Ramen, and continued driving my 1988 Ford Tempo until it died.

I'm not saying this to boast or chest pound. In fact, I never thought twice about any of it. Never thought twice about renting a small, cheap room in an apartment near my day job. Never thought twice about walking down to the farmers' market every Sunday morning to buy cheap fruits and vegetables or using coupons to buy food and toothpaste.

I never thought twice about wearing a light jacket in my room during the winter, or walking around my living room shirtless during the scorching hot summers for which Baltimore is infamous. It beat the hell out of a pricey gas and electric bill.

In fact, I actually considered myself to be quite fortunate back then. Because although I had to work two jobs to make ends meet, I still had food to eat, a roof over my head, and I was able to make more than the minimum payments on my college loan. Compare that to my parents who

did the exact same things, but while raising a child... or compare that to my grandfather, who never even graduated high school because he was too busy taking care of the farm and going off to join the military at age 17. This puts things into perspective, don't you think?

Food vs. Netflix

I've always considered my early days out of college pretty easy. And when I did finally pay off my college loan, I felt no need to tell the world about it, despite the fact that I did pay it off early.

Look, I'm certainly not attacking the guy for wiping out his debt in such a short amount of time. But the pride he displayed in his story about it was just bizarre. Have we really become a nation that's so buried in debt that we're now supposed to applaud those who take steps to eliminate it? Moreover, am I supposed to be praising this guy who, instead of getting a second job –even for just a few days a week –held out his hand for food stamps?

This guy wasn't some brilliant money manager who figured out a secret way to eliminate his debt. He pinched his pennies, took a few handouts, and cut his expenses –which, by the way, I found mildly amusing when he explained this one:

I got rid of cable and replaced it with an AT&T U-Verse Internet connection and streaming Netflix account –slashing my bill from \$135 to just \$55 a month.

He could've slashed his bill from \$135 to \$0 a month had he just decided to spend his spare time doing something other than watching movies in his apartment. But I guess that's expecting too much these days. Still, it's quite bizarre. I mean, this guy said he sometimes went to bed hungry, but he still insisted on paying \$55 a month for his streaming Netflix account? My friends, if this guy went to bed hungry, that was his own fault. Do you realize how much bean soup, rice and beans, and sacks of potatoes you can buy with \$55?

While plenty of folks left congratulatory comments on this guy's article, I'm simply going to chalk this one up to another spoiled American kid who doesn't really know what sacrifice truly means. And while McBride basks in the glory of his huge accomplishment, there are hard-working folks all over this country that have been working two or three jobs for years just to provide food and shelter for their families — *while not asking the government for a dime.*

It's guys like McBride who actually make it more difficult for the folks that really do need some temporary assistance. They abuse the system to a point where those who are truly in need become vilified. And that's a real shame. Because not everyone on government assistance is a Fortune 500 company or spoiled college kid. Differentiating between the two isn't difficult, yet clearly it's something the government is incapable of doing effectively. And as a result, the futile war on poverty continues, the partisan bickering divides us further and those who continue to game the system do so without a care in the world.

Chapter 5

The War on Drugs

See, if you look at the drug war from a purely economic point of view, the role of the government is to protect the drug cartel. That's literally true.

– Milton Friedman

The Nation's First Drug Czar

Few things fire me up more than an overfed bureaucrat dictating failed policy with an iron fist. So needless to say, when I heard what President Obama's drug czar, Gil Kerlikowske, said at a National Press Club luncheon back in 2013, I was furious.

In reference to new state laws allowing for the sale of marijuana for both recreational and medicinal purposes, the former police chief for Buffalo, New York, told the media that no state, no executive can nullify a statute that has been passed by Congress. Never mind the fact that the statute that was passed by Congress in the 1930s was nothing more than an attempt to appease a mid-level bureaucrat looking to lock in additional funding for his department. (I'll get to that in just one moment.)

The truth is individual states absolutely have the right to institute their own laws regarding marijuana. In fact, I would argue that since the federal government has no incentive to do the right thing here, it is up to individual states to counter federal regulations that for more than 30 years have facilitated the destruction of local economies and local communities.

It's no secret that the War on Drugs has cost us more than \$1 trillion –that's *trillion* with a “t.” The cost of human life has been overwhelming, and the incarceration of non-violent drug offenders has disproportionately affected minorities and the poor, serving as a systematic form of slavery that traces its roots back to a federal bureaucrat who unapologetically used propaganda-style techniques that were also employed by Hitler, Stalin, and Mao.

His name was Harry J. Anslinger. He was appointed in 1930 as the first director of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics. Anslinger sought to outlaw marijuana as a way to ensure job security. After all, it would be hard to make the case for continued funding on just opiate and cocaine crackdowns. So he searched for a scapegoat and found it in the nation's poorer minority communities –a place where he knew there would be little backlash.

Of course, it didn't hurt that Anslinger was already known for racist rhetoric and a passion for outrageous lies based on little more than the illusions painted by yellow journalists. The result?

Well, take a look at some of these quotes from the past...

“There are 100,000 total marijuana smokers in the U.S., and most are Negroes, Hispanics, Filipinos, and entertainers. Their satanic music, jazz and swing, result from marijuana use. This marijuana causes white women to seek sexual relations with Negroes, entertainers and any others.”

“... the primary reason to outlaw marijuana is its effect on the degenerate races.”

“Marijuana leads to pacifism and communist brainwashing...”

“You smoke a joint and you’re likely to kill your brother.”

“Reefer makes darkies think they’re as good as white men.”

“Marijuana is the most violence-causing drug in the history of mankind.”

This, my friends, was really the nation’s first drug czar –the same man who got the ball rolling on an agenda that would eventually rip our nation apart... and actually create opportunity for those that have no interest in constitutional or basic civil rights.

In this next section, I’ll take a closer look at those who have continued to facilitate the war on drugs since Harry Anslinger unleashed one of the most brutal wars this nation has ever fought, as well as the big money that continues to be made at the expense of honest, hard-working Americans.

The Politics of Pot

On November 6, 2012, the good people of Colorado voted to pass Amendment 64, which would allow for the legalization of marijuana for recreational use by adults. Projected tax revenues from marijuana sales were initially estimated to be as high as \$22 million annually, and this doesn’t count the millions Colorado law enforcement would ultimately save on small-scale marijuana investigations and convictions.

Although I have no use for marijuana myself, I certainly support the right of any American to use the plant for recreational, industrial or medicinal purposes. And I’m not alone. Certainly, Ron Paul garnered much support during the 2012 election cycle from pro-marijuana advocates, and Libertarian candidate Gary Johnson made no secret of his support for managing marijuana like alcohol and tobacco.

There have also been a number of studies over the past few years that indicate the tide is turning in favor of those who support ending the prohibition of marijuana, including a Gallup poll that showed a majority of Americans (50% in favor, 46% opposed) *from both sides of the aisle* supporting the legalization of marijuana.

But despite what seems to be a sea change in attitudes regarding the legalization of marijuana, and despite the fact that Colorado approved its own recreational marijuana legislation, and despite the fact that 17 states and the District of Columbia now have medical marijuana laws on the books, with one phone call from the White House, federal law officials can still completely ignore state marijuana laws, swoop in, and start arresting law-abiding citizens at will –all in the name of the War on Drugs.

Now technically, the War on Drugs was officially declared on October 27, 1970. Incidentally, this was also the date that the Tenth Amendment of the Constitution was violated. As you probably know, the Tenth Amendment declares that powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the states, are reserved to the states respectively, or to the people.

The truth is, if the folks in Washington adhered to the demands of this amendment, the drug war –which has cost us more than \$1 trillion –would never have happened. But of course, that doesn't matter to them. Because nowadays, in Washington, the Bill of Rights is just a piece of paper.

The Tenth Amendment Center actually provides some great commentary about this, writing:

By 1937 Franklin Roosevelt signed the Marijuana Tax Act into law, effectively banning marijuana at the federal level. All the major federal drug laws since then had no Constitutional basis, and all of them seemed to come with general expansion of federal power.

Just as Wilson's ban on heroin and regulation of cocaine came during the activist Progressive Era and marijuana prohibition was part of FDR's New Deal, the next major wave of federal drug law came in the 1960s, during the Great Society, and culminated in the 1970 Controlled Substances Act just as Nixon was continuing LBJ's policies of guns and butter.

Of course, this was a long time ago, but little has changed. Both Bill Clinton and George W. Bush were aggressively hostile toward medicinal marijuana facilities. And while President Obama told voters that medical marijuana was an issue best left to state and local government, few in his administration blinked an eye when they launched a major federal crackdown on medical marijuana facilities in 2012 that left an estimated 730,000 law-abiding citizens without the very thing that was prescribed by their doctors, some of whom were incredibly sick or dying.

Then there's the highly-publicized story of the 38-year-old father of two Matthew Davies who found his legal marijuana growing operations raided by federal agents in 2011. Although Davies had complied with all of California's laws, the feds didn't care. Moreover, the Obama-appointed U.S. attorney for California's Eastern District tried to get Davies to agree to a plea that would include a minimum of five years in prison. Journalist Conor Friedersdorf provided an

interesting analysis on this case, writing...

Let's set the legal questions aside and think through the cost of this course:

- *The opportunity cost of focusing on other crimes*
- *\$235,000 in incarceration costs*
- *Two young girls with an absent father*
- *Substantial lost tax revenue from his operation*
- *Other marijuana sellers go underground*
- *Less savory drug dealers, including violent cartels, get more business*
- *More of a hassle for sick medical marijuana patients to get their prescriptions filled.*

Doesn't that seem awfully 'expensive' when the only real benefit is sending the message that you can't get away with openly flouting federal drug laws?"

Interestingly, as a result of many of these federal raids, drug cartels (which, by the way, your tax dollars are being used to fight unsuccessfully) get a noticeable boom in business.

The bottom line is that this costly and ineffective War on Drugs not only tramples your rights, but it's siphoning your wealth, too. Whether it's footing the bill to send federal troops into other countries to stop the flow of drugs or funding the construction of new prisons that will house non-violent drug offenders that now make up about 25% of total prison populations, you're essentially being robbed by a government that has little respect for the Constitution.

Of course, while we must be more vigilant in our efforts to protect states rights, state and local politicians aren't necessarily innocent in their facilitation of the drug war, either.

Pot and Prisons

There's little doubt that politicians typically make decisions based on which company ponies up the most cash. And in the case of decisions on marijuana legalization, some of this boils down to private prison lobbying efforts, particularly at the state-level.

For instance, in 2012, law officials stormed Vista Grande High School in Casa Grande, Arizona. Fully-armed, they ordered the entire school on lockdown and began a major sweep for illegal drugs. Drug-sniffing dogs searched lockers, backpacks, and even students, while kids stood by nervously, waiting to be interrogated by police. But as it turned out, some of the "police" weren't police at all. They were nothing more than employees of a private prison company wearing uniforms that could easily be mistaken for law enforcement officials. And apparently, using prison employees to assist in these types of raids is nothing new. It's actually been going on for

years.

It's been heavily criticized as illegal and a violation of civil rights –and it begs the question, *Why would a private prison even want to be involved in these types of operations, anyway?* Well, I'm about to tell you.

On the day of the drug raid, Corrections Corporation of America (CCA), the for-profit prison company that sent employees to Vista Grande High School dressed similarly to police officers, added three units of inventory –i.e. processed and warehoused three students, two for the equivalent of one marijuana cigarette. And with the processing and warehousing of those “violent” criminals, CCA got a few more tax dollars.

You see, the company makes money on every prisoner and detainee it warehouses. And all revenues are derived from government contracts that pay an actual per-prisoner rate. This has resulted in annual revenues of \$1.7 billion for CCA.

But think about that for a second: CCA makes money when people are arrested and warehoused. It doesn't matter if they're guilty or not. As long as they can get someone in the system, they get paid. So, is it any wonder the company has been more than willing to “assist” real law enforcement in these types of raids? And how is it that employees of a private prison can even be involved in arresting anyone?

Well, as it turns out, in Arizona the “administrative code” exempts private prison contractors from obtaining the certification required to take on the duties of a peace officer. And why would such an exemption exist? Perhaps because CCA is the largest non-government employer in Pinal County, Arizona? Not a bad deal, assuming you're not the one being harassed or potentially set up by one of these guys.

Of course, CCA and other private prison companies are simply playing the game the government created. In other words, if you got the cash, you can do pretty much anything –even impersonate a police officer.

Let's face it: the pay-to-play game isn't new. And private prison companies aren't barred from the halls of Congress. In fact, in 2012 the Justice Policy Institute released a report uncovering the political strategies of private prison companies, which essentially involved lobbying for harsher policies and longer sentences. According to the report, the private prison industry employed three strategies to influence policy: lobbying, direct campaign contributions, and networking.

The three largest private prison companies contributed \$835,514 to federal candidates and more than \$6 million to state politicians. The return on that investment: The Federal Bureau of Prisons is paying private companies with access to politicians \$5.1 billion for 13 contracts of varying lengths.

Look, it's not that I have a problem with privately-run prisons. The problem is with the way the system is set up. The government is still too closely involved. Politicians are making special exemptions and influencing policy based on how much these private prison companies pony up in campaign contributions. It's just another way for the government to misuse tax dollars and create policy that benefits the highest bidder, not the taxpayer.

Now, I'm not saying I have any concrete solutions to this problem –other than dragging *all* special interests out of Washington. And the odds in favor of that happening are not promising. But when these politicians are so heavily indebted to these private prison companies that they allow non-trained law enforcement to conduct police raids and harass our kids at school, we have to ask, what's next? Are private prison employees going to bust into your office with guns drawn? Are they going to bully their way into your home with drug-sniffing dogs?

You know, the Fourth Amendment guards against unreasonable searches and seizures. Are private prison companies going to find a way around that one? I'm not trying to be a fear monger, but these are slippery slopes. And even the slightest suspicion that some lawmakers are looking the other way while our Fourth Amendment rights could potentially be sold for the right price is cause for alarm.

Private prison employees are *not* police officers –and our elected officials are not kings and queens who've been granted the authority to knight them as such. But this is exactly how they're acting. So is it any wonder it's been such a struggle to legalize marijuana? After all, private prisons rely on the drug war. Hell, CCA even helped fund California's No on 19 campaign through donations to congresswoman Diane Feinstein and the Democratic Party. California's Proposition 19 was a ballot initiative that would've legalized personal marijuana-related activities.

Private prisons need an active drug war. And let's not forget the pharmaceutical corporations, prison guard unions, and police unions, too, all of which do quite well when drugs –especially marijuana –are illegal.

These are all organizations that spend a lot of money on lobbying efforts. And as you know, when it comes to policy, it's not that which is in the best interests of the American people, but rather that which is in the best interests of the biggest donors. Pharmaceutical companies, private prison companies, unions. You want to end the drug war? Hold lawmakers accountable for their loyalty to special interests over the people. After all, it's those lawmakers that are directly and indirectly contributing to a never-ending war that has helped bankrupt the soul of this country. It has cost us more than a trillion dollars, countless lives, and has denied the right of American adults to medicate and recreate on their own terms, peacefully.

PART III

Gays, Guns, and Dunce Caps

Chapter 6

Betrothed in Bigotry

Love is bigger than government

– Jesse Ventura

Remove the Government from the Equation

He looks like an intern I once hired. With a big goofy grin and shaggy hair, Oklahoma State Representative Mike Turner does not appear to be your typical stuffed-shirt politician. And the truth is, he may not be. Still in his twenties, he's probably one of the youngest to serve in the Oklahoma State Legislature.

Now I don't know much about Turner's politics, although based on his website, it's quite obvious he's of the conservative brand. After a quick scan of his take on certain issues, it's likely I probably agree with him on a number of things – particularly those associated with government spending, taxes and education, although I haven't really investigated this outside of the copy on his website. In any event, I'm going to assume that we probably wouldn't disagree on much in the way of limited government. But on social issues, I know we would be at odds.

That being said, in January, 2014, Turner made headlines with a proposal that, while I believe is based on a less-than-honorable stance on gay marriage, makes sense. You see, my feelings on gay marriage are no secret to those who know anything about me. I fully support the rights of gay and lesbian Americans to marry. The fact that we even argue over whether or not gay or lesbian couples should have the right to marry is ludicrous. Who cares? Well, apparently a lot of folks. So I won't spend any time arguing that reality here. And to be honest, I have no interest in persuading anyone to accept anything they don't find acceptable. However, I would like to draw your attention to something Mike Turner did that actually strikes a chord with me.

Now, I know Turner is anti-gay marriage. I don't know if he really cares one way or the other, or if he's just trying to satisfy his constituents. Either way, this is an issue on which we would certainly disagree.

However, Turner proposed removing the power of the state government to regulate marriage. He wanted to do this to ensure that same-sex couples couldn't get married in Oklahoma.

If he's looking to hurt same-sex couples, that's pretty crappy. It's petty. But to be honest, I actually agree with his proposal. I'm not sure I ever really understood why the government is involved in marriages anyway. Other than having yet one more opportunity to charge you for something

that you have every right to do *without* the government's consent, there doesn't seem to be a rational argument for the government to be involved. Ron Paul chimed in on this a few years ago saying:

“I think the government should just be out of it. I think it should be done by the church or private contract, and we shouldn't have this argument. Who's married and who isn't married. I have my standards but I shouldn't have to impose my standards on others. Other people have their standards and they have no rights to impose their marriage standards on me.”

I agree 100%. Quite frankly, gay marriage would be a non-issue if the government had nothing to do with it. Again, although I don't necessarily find Turner's take on gay marriage to be an honorable one, his solution does make sense.

In other words, I don't agree with making marriage illegal. The government shouldn't be able to dictate whether or not two people can marry. But yes, I agree with taking the government out of the equation.

As Ron Paul has suggested, marriage should be done by the church or private contract. This way, anyone can get married –gay or straight –and we wouldn't have to waste one more penny debating this nonsense.

A No-Brainer

I'm a pretty practical guy. I'm a capitalist, a believer in free-markets and a supporter of freedom and liberty. So it is for those reasons that I could never oppose gay marriage, as well as because I believe in doing the right thing, not because of dogma, but because treating others with respect is righteous.

Now consider these benefits for married couples that don't always apply to gay couples that are unable to marry:

- Spouses are allowed hospital visitation rights and can make medical decisions in the event of illness.
- Spouses are offered sick leave by employers, as well as health insurance plans.
- Spouses are not taxed when giving gifts.
- Spouses are typically allowed joint custody and visitation in case of divorce. Obligations for child support also exist.
- Spouses are often entitled to retirement and disability benefits.

Also consider the basic financial benefits. How could any free-market supporter oppose gay marriage when the economics make sense? Nationally, we're talking about more than \$50 billion in economic activity –per year! The wedding industry is a lucrative one. Again, the absurdity of outlawing something the government really has no business being involved in anyway is mind-boggling. Then throw in the economic benefits, and it's a no-brainer.

Of course, there are those who do oppose gay marriage for personal or religious reasons. And that's fine. Removing the government from the marriage equation would have zero effect on those who oppose gay marriage. As well, with gay couples choosing to wed, either through a church or private contract, no one's constitutional or civil rights would be violated.

Bottom line: Seeking to disallow anyone the opportunity to enjoy the happiness and benefits of a loving relationship and loving family is an exercise in tyranny.

Chapter 7

Teaching, Preaching, and the Decline of Public Education

Education is the key to unlock the golden door of freedom

– George Washington Carver

The Problem with Public Education

Unlike a lot of libertarians, I don't have a problem with public education. I do, however, have a problem with public education in its current form.

You see, when it comes to public education, I'm a firm believer in the federal government having no say in how we choose to teach our kids. The way I see it, this is a state issue, should be funded by the states, and should only involve the federal government in situations where state governments are denying the constitutional rights of students and parents.

Now I realize that by leaving this decision up to the states, some states will certainly churn out more doctors, engineers and scientists than others. Some states simply have more money and resources to devote to education. As well, I'm sure there would be a lot of children in specific regions who would ultimately be unfamiliar with evolution or the literary works of certain authors that are deemed offensive by certain religious types. I don't say this to belittle religious folks either. This is simply an observation of truth. And that's OK. Because here's the deal...

If you're a parent, and you're unhappy with what the public school in your state is teaching your children, you do have options. If you can afford it, there are always private schools that capitalize on the type of education that may be lacking. This is the beauty of a free market. Of course, not everyone can afford private school. And while there's certainly plenty to be said for the benefits of home schooling, some parents simply cannot juggle a full-time job and handle being a teacher five days a week.

I know quite a few parents today who don't agree with everything their children are or aren't being taught in school, so they take care of those lessons in the home. For instance, one college buddy of mine is a Christian. He accepts that evolution is taught in the public school, but he also instills his own beliefs to his kids when they're all at home. Another friend of mine is a chemical engineer. Her daughter's math skills are far superior to those of her classmates because she takes the time to challenge those skills while at home.

If there is a void in a public school environment, it *can* be filled. It just requires some actual parenting –something that's lacking in many of our communities today. This reality is a sad one,

as millions of our children lose out. I don't care how good the school is; if a child isn't getting the love and discipline he or she needs at home, it's going to be very difficult for that child to enjoy success as an adult. Not impossible, but certainly the deck is stacked against those kids. And no amount of federal government intervention can alleviate this problem.

However, with a more localized approach to public education, the responsibility for these kids is brought closer to individual communities and parents. A federal employee working out of D.C. has no idea as to what challenges a middle-class kid in Montana is facing. He has no idea what it's like to be poverty-stricken in Mississippi while trying to go to school on an empty stomach. He doesn't know which kids are being abused and which aren't. He couldn't tell you how many parents in Youngstown, OH have the time to work with their kids outside of school. He's completely removed from the realities that our nation's kids face every single day. Yet we charge these folks with the responsibility of administering one-size-fits-all standards designed to churn out educated Americans as if they were one-dimensional robots on an assembly line.

These days, our kids are taught little more than how to pass a standardized test. Meanwhile, their math and science skills are incredibly inferior to those of kids their same ages in China and India, and they're being set up to trivialize the importance of entrepreneurship and creativity. Truth is, you'd be hard-pressed to find many schools today still offering quality music, art and literature classes. A well-rounded education is a necessity if we want the future of this country to be armed with the skills it will require to compete in the global marketplace. Stripped-down course requirements and standardized tests won't accomplish this.

Of course, that's not to say some states wouldn't continue working the same broken system. But at least there would be more accountability on a more localized level, where it's not quite as easy to hide behind antique oak lecterns, stone-faced press secretaries, and federal police.

Yes, it's Welfare

I'm perfectly willing to admit that public education –even run at the state level –is a form of welfare. But I do believe that without some form of public education, those children most vulnerable to poverty, violence, and failure will be hurt the most. Sure, we could say we could rely on non-profits and churches to come to the rescue, but I'm a realist, and I don't believe for a moment that there are enough well-capitalized churches and non-profits to take on the role of public education funders.

Now, some would simply argue that it is not the job of every American to pitch in to educate other peoples' kids. And they're right. But think about the outcome if so many of these at-risk kids are denied access to a basic education. You want to see a spike in crime? Do everything you can to keep the masses uneducated. It's the fastest way to guarantee that.

Although I believe the public school system as we know it is severely flawed, it makes more

sense to fix it instead of abandoning it altogether. Shift the responsibility over to state and local governments and take the federal government out of the equation. This doesn't guarantee a perfect solution, but it's not like the current system we have is effective.

I agree with former Congressman Ron Paul's statement:

We should encourage homeschooling & private schooling and let the individuals write that off. The parents have to get control of the education. It used to be parents had control of education through local school boards. Today it's the judicial system and the executive branch of government, the bureaucracy, that controls things, and it would be predictable that the quality would go down. The money goes to the bureaucrats and not to the educational system.

The High Cost of Higher Education

Recessions, depressions, boom times, and busts. Regardless of the overall state of the economy, you can always count on three businesses to thrive: alcohol, gambling and higher education. This makes sense.

If you're out of work, alcohol helps the pain go away. A Mega Millions lottery ticket is the poor man's "big chance" illusion of economic freedom. And when there's no work for young people, college is a safe haven that allows twenty-somethings to insulate themselves from reality for at least four to six years.

Don't get me wrong; I'm not knocking college. And quite frankly, if we have any hope of remaining competitive in a global market, we need to start churning out more engineers, doctors, and scientists immediately. You need a college education for that. But let's face it, college isn't cheap. In 2013, we got a reminder of this as the government debated over increasing the interest rates for federally subsidized student loans. Both sides of the aisle played the blame game while trying to save face with young voters, but few bothered to take on the important question...

Why is the government even involved with this?

College is Not a Right

There are three main arguments for continuing a federally-subsidized college loan program. The first is that these loans enable students to afford the high cost of a college education. But the truth is a college education wouldn't be so expensive if the government just stayed out of it.

Colleges and universities can charge outrageous fees because they know students can get cheap money, thanks to the government. Take the government out of that equation, and all of a sudden these institutions of higher learning have to adjust to a more competitive environment –one where fancy gymnasiums and high-end dorms with movie theaters would have to take a backseat to reductions in tuition.

The second argument is that college is a right, and that these loans provide all young people with the opportunity to go to college. Of course college is not a right, but the opportunity to take advantage of this privilege does exist, with or without government subsidized loans.

And the third argument is that the government actually makes money from these student loans.

The devil is in the details with this one: The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) claims that from 2013 to 2020, government-backed Stafford loans will result in about \$160 billion in profits. But the accounting on this is a bit tricky as some analysts suggest that it underestimates the potential of students defaulting or tying their payments to their income. Bottom line: This is not reassuring for taxpayers who are already on the hook for dozens of other failed government programs. And let's be honest, who in his right mind would, without a guarantee from the government, back \$40,000 in student loans for high school graduates, with no real assets, looking to major in sociology or peace studies?

Get a Job!

Of course, if I were getting ready to graduate from high school today, I'd bypass college altogether and learn a trade –something that would enable me to possess a valuable, tangible skill. The truth is, web designers, lawyers, and cocky MBAs are a dime a dozen. But do you realize how hard it is to find a good electrician, plumber, welder or HVAC technician? And let me tell you something: You can earn some serious cash in some of these fields.

While there are plenty of college graduates moving back in with their parents, I know a 26-year-old electrician who, just three years after his apprenticeship, is now pulling in about \$60,000 a year –not including overtime. He tells me he can make an extra \$10,000 to \$15,000 a year with added overtime.

An acquaintance of mine who I see at the gym every so often installs air conditioning systems in commercial buildings and warehouses. He's been doing this for 12 years now. It's hard work, but even after the real estate market took a nosedive, he was still pulling in more than \$40,000 a year at the lowest point. In 2013, he pocketed \$63,000, thanks mostly to an increase in new construction work here in Baltimore.

Point is instead of trying to help all high school graduates get cheaper interest rates for college loans, perhaps we should be more supportive of those young people who are not interested in

college and want to seek out a vocational career. The work is virtually guaranteed and the cost of training is minimal compared to what most colleges charge today for a piece of paper. I'm not saying it's the perfect match for all students, but quite frankly, there are just too many kids running off to school with no idea of what they want to do, racking up huge amounts of debt and being released into the workforce with few valuable skills and little hope of finding a well-paying job. It just doesn't seem to make sense that the government should be supporting and helping to facilitate this trend.

Chapter 8

The Second Amendment is Not Optional

No Free man shall ever be debarred the use of arms

– Thomas Jefferson

The Second Amendment

Following the Sandy Hook Tragedy in 2012, I found it extremely difficult to get through the week without thinking about what actually happened, why it happened and of course, the debate over gun control that took a millisecond to monopolize a lot of lawmakers' time.

Reading about the victims and the victims' families nearly brought me to tears on more than one occasion. And reading the opinion pieces about gun control and the lack of mental health support in this country was beyond frustrating.

In this section, I'll dive into the issue of gun control and what I believe is the bigger picture on America's gun violence problem –a big picture, by the way, that few in the mainstream media are ever willing to address.

The Big Picture

In 2012, there were roughly 9,000 gun-related homicides in the United States. Those, by the way, don't include gun-related homicides that didn't get tallied in year-end totals. There are likely thousands more that go unreported every year –some of which are intentionally omitted by unethical government employees looking to cook the books in an effort to create the illusion of a “safer” city or state.

Of course, even one gun-related homicide –really any kind of homicide, for that matter –is a tragedy. But what's most frustrating is the way we deal with this gun-related violence reality as a nation. There is no doubt that we live in a violent society, but it seems like we only pay attention after we witness a mass shooting. These are horrible events that absolutely highlight a problem we have as a nation and as a society. However, there's a bigger picture here that few are willing to address –and this bigger picture represents the source of nearly all of the gun-related violence in this country.

The Big Question

In 2012, there were 16 mass shootings that left 88 people dead. 88 sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, friends, cousins, co-workers, aunts, uncles, and grandparents stolen from the ones they loved and who loved them. These mass shootings have been defined as multi-victim shootings where those killed were chosen indiscriminately, and have taken place in movie theaters, spas, courthouses, churches, elementary schools, and at sporting events. So it's not even remotely unexpected that with each mass shooting tragedy, many folks will question the availability of assault weapons and high-capacity magazines. But here's something we should also be questioning...

If 88 innocent lives were taken because of mass shootings, that means more than 8,000 other people were killed as a result of gun violence — but in different, non-mass shooting situations.

Guns Aren't Illiterate, Unemployed and Strung Out

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to see where the majority of these gun-related deaths occur. Most are not in our suburban schools, movie theaters, and high-rise office suites. The truth is, most gun-related deaths happen in the streets of our most violent cities and in areas where there are specific commonalities, no matter where you go in this country. What are those commonalities?

The districts and neighborhoods where we see most of the nation's gun-related homicides take place are plagued by broken homes, third- and fourth-generation welfare families, high unemployment, low literacy rates, rampant drug abuse, and limited opportunities for kids to spend their time constructively. These are the ingredients for a violent society. Yet it's this part of society that most of us never see or hear about. All we see are the numbers at the end of the year.

Here's a list of some of the nation's most violent cities:

City	Total Homicides (2012)
Chicago	500
New York	419
Detroit	386
Philadelphia	331
Los Angeles	299
Baltimore	219
Houston	217
New Orleans	193
Dallas	154
Memphis	133

In these 10 cities alone, 2,851 people were tragically killed in 2012.

These aren't just numbers; these are real people with real families. And their lives are no less important than the lives of those lost in mass shootings that the mainstream media rushes to cover –and that gun control advocates use to further their goal of restricting the gun rights of responsible gun owners. But rest assured, the majority of those 2,851 people that were the victims of gun violence in our most dangerous cities were not murdered by those carrying legally-obtained firearms.

If we are truly determined to reduce gun violence in the United States, we must address the roots of the problem, which are not firearms, ammunition, and responsible gun owners. The roots of this problem are a lack of economic opportunity, the absence of quality education, absentee parents, and, of course a government-funded drug war that spurs criminal activity and violence.

Aside from parental absenteeism, all of these problems can be traced back to the heavy hand of a burdensome federal government. So instead of making it more difficult for responsible gun owners to own firearms in an effort to reduce gun violence, perhaps a more appropriate step would be to strip the federal government of its powers to instigate these problems to begin with.

PART IV

Back to the Future: Archival Rants of a Libertarian Treehugger

While putting this book together, I found a number of rants and raves I had published in the past. I wanted to somehow seamlessly integrate these previous posts in the various chapters of this book, but after making a number of attempts to do so, I came to the conclusion that I was trying to force a square peg into a round hole. It just wasn't going to work. However, I still found many of these articles worthy of inclusion. So I simply added a fourth section entitled: "*Back to the Future: Archival Rants of a Libertarian Treehugger.*"

The pieces I chose to include have been unedited with original publication dates attached. They further represent what I believe to be a rational, libertarian-leaning response to many of today's most pressing environmental, social and economic problems.

The FDA's \$3 Million Welfare Scam

December 29, 2012

It was perfect timing...

While families all over the nation gathered to break bread before Christmas morning, and parents quietly assembled new toys for their kids and set out plates of bell-shaped sugar cookies for Santa, the U.S. government was busy screwing us again.

On December 24, a day when most folks leave work early and do a bit of last-minute Christmas shopping, the FDA was hard at work assuring that one of its closest friends in Washington got an early Christmas present: approval for a new product that could make a select few lobbyists very rich.

Friends of Obama

On Christmas Eve, the FDA quietly approved a new genetically-engineered salmon that can grow twice as fast as ordinary salmon.

The company that creates these fish in its laboratory is called AquaBounty Technologies, and the company's CEO claims that despite the genetic modifications, the fish is "perfectly safe" for human consumption — and poses no threat to the environment or food chain.

Let me tell you something: I trust the CEO of a biotech company about as much as I trust the CEO of a bank. And the fact that the FDA decided to approve this new salmon on the day before Christmas smells, pardon the pun, fishy...

The fact of the matter is there is minimal objective data on this genetically-modified (GM) fish, and certainly not enough to suggest that it's ready to be deep fried and turned into croquettes.

But that doesn't matter when you've got friends on the inside...

You see, it just so happens that the commissioner of the FDA is a former genetically-modified foods lobbyist that was hired by President Obama to regulate the very industry for which he once lobbied.

Funny how that works, huh?

The fox is guarding the hen house, my friends — and once again, we see more evidence of just how useless these bloated bureaucracies can be.

3 Million Taxpayer Dollars

Look, I'm not an anti-science guy. And I'm not opposed to a biotech company looking to make a buck.

But the more research I did on this company and its ties to the government, the more I realized these genetically-engineered salmon are not only unsafe — but the development of these “frankenfish” has been heavily funded by taxpayers since 2003.

I'll be perfectly honest: I'm no fan of this kind of genetic modification. I don't trust it, and I don't wish to eat anything Mother Nature has not provided. So yes, I tend to be very critical of the GM industry and the safety claims it makes.

That being said, I'm no scientist. So I'm not going to launch into a diatribe about the evils of Monsanto and GM foods.

I will, however, be happy to show you how AquaBounty and the U.S. government have together been scamming taxpayers for almost an entire decade.

You see, since 2003 AquaBounty has landed more than \$2.4 million dollars in federal research grants. The company was awarded \$1.68 million from the Department of Commerce, \$550,000 from the Department of Agriculture, and \$200,000 from the National Science Foundation. As well, the USDA provided \$494,000 in funding for the company's sterilization research.

That's nearly \$3 million to a company that ultimately has to receive approval from the same government that helped fund it with taxpayer dollars.

What a racket! And by the way, this stuff ain't safe, either...

Just Another Backroom Deal

Despite the FDA's fast-track approval and a number of flawed studies provided by AquaBounty, there is significant evidence that shows AquaBounty's frankenfish to contain high levels of IGF-1 (insulin-like growth factor 1), which has been linked to cancer and early puberty.

And researchers not on the FDA's payroll have also found there is insufficient research on the allergic potential of AquaBounty's genetically-engineered fish. According to a 2010 FDA briefing packet, the FDA couldn't even determine if the fish in question would cause more allergies than other fish.

Interestingly, despite President Obama's pledge to have all genetically-modified foods labeled –a

pledge that quickly disappeared once he was elected, this stuff doesn't have to be labeled. You could actually go to your grocery store one day and unknowingly purchase this marginally tested Frankenfish.

Then there's the issue of the genetically-engineered salmon getting into wild populations...

Although AquaBounty claimed its GM salmon could never interact with wild salmon populations, it noted that no single containment measure can be assured of 100% effectiveness. The FDA has actually cited these claims to be potentially misleading, yet approval was fast-tracked nonetheless.

Again, having friends in Washington can make all the difference.

By the way, mixing the Frankenfish with wild fish populations could do irreparable harm to the food chain, and it puts the entire U.S. salmon industry at risk...

But sure, go ahead and fast-track its approval.

Don't think for a second that this whole thing hasn't been a backroom deal from day one.

The fact that the FDA leads SWAT-style raids on family stores selling raw milk, but approves AquaBounty's Frankenfish speaks volumes about how this bureaucracy is being run.

The White House is for Sale!

March 1, 2013

The White House is officially on the market!

I'm not kidding.

No, there's no "For Sale" sign swinging in the wind on that carefully manicured lawn... but make no mistake about it; in D.C., everything's got a price.

And that includes access to the man of the house at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

This Smells Fishy

In an effort to turn President Obama's reelection campaign into an advocacy network, the group known as Organizing for Action will now rely on a small number of very wealthy donors to keep it funded.

Because Organizing for Action is set up as a tax-exempt social welfare group — and not as a campaigning vehicle — it doesn't have to abide by federal contribution limits.

In other words, the group does not have to disclose the names of its donors or how much they give.

According to the New York Times, Organizing for Action will hold a founders summit next month at a hotel in D.C. where donors paying \$500,000 each will have the opportunity to meet and mingle with the president's former campaign manager.

The New York Times piece goes on to say:

Giving or raising \$500,000 or more puts donors on a national advisory board for Mr. Obama's group and the privilege of attending quarterly meetings with the president, along with other meetings at the White House. Moreover, the new cash demands on Mr. Obama's top donors and bundlers come as many of them are angling for appointments to administration jobs or ambassadorships.

I don't know about you, but this whole thing smells fishy.

Ethics Are for Suckers!

Unethical or not, it does seem the president has found a way to legally use this organization as a way to fund his second-term agenda. Not that such a thing is new in Washington. It's just that this president uncovered a new loophole that allows him to bypass ethics regulations that exist to counter this type of thing.

Interestingly, the group claims that its resources will help support efforts to curb gun violence.

And this got me thinking...

If the White House is looking for direction on how to curb gun violence, why not talk to the folks who live in this nation's most dangerous neighborhoods, which (as I've pointed out on numerous occasions) are plagued by broken homes, third- and fourth-generation welfare families, high unemployment, low literacy rates, rampant drug abuse, and limited opportunities for kids to spend their time constructively.

Seems to me these folks are more affected by gun violence than deep-pocketed bankers with half a million dollars to blow...

Or perhaps time would be better spent speaking with all those law-abiding gun owners in this country who can't rely on law enforcement for protection, so they protect themselves and their families on their own — properly armed and responsibly trained.

Why not meet with those folks?

Oh, that's right – most of them don't have a spare \$500,000 lying around.

My friends, this is just more evidence that our government regularly sells our constitutional rights to the highest bidder.

Even MSNBC's Chuck Todd criticized this new fundraising effort, writing, "This just looks bad — it looks like the White House is selling access. It's the definition of selling access."

Fire Up the Spin Machine

After the New York Times first reported on Organizing for Action, press secretary Jay Carney fired up the spin machine.

When asked by a reporter if donors to Organizing for America would meet with the President, Carney responded:

The fact is, there are a variety of rules governing interaction between administration officials and outside groups, and administration officials follow those rules. White House and administration officials will not be raising money for Organizing for Action, and while they may appear at appropriate OFA events, in their official capacities they will not be raising money.

... Because clearly those who shell out a half million dollars do so to meet with a chatty press secretary and a couple of cute bartenders that serve them top shelf scotch.

Don't kid yourself.

If President Obama or any other high-ranking member of his cabinet shows up at one of these events, he's raising cash.

Because you see, you don't have to hold out your hand to accept a donation. You just need to be there. To suggest otherwise is a lie.

Of course, you'll find plenty of other equally snake-like fundraising vehicles on the other side of the aisle as well. But let us not forget that it was President Obama who, throughout this last election, railed against special interest influence.

Now here we are, just a few months into his second term, and the president is actively taking part in the very thing he vilified in order to get your vote.

Imagine that!

Terrorists Discovered Working in U.S. Sheriff's Office

May 31, 2013

Marty Atencio was 44 when he died.

A third-generation veteran, he paid the ultimate price — but not on the battlefield in some faraway land...

No, Marty paid the ultimate price, right here in the United States for simply being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

It all went down on December 15, 2011.

Marty, who was diagnosed with a serious mental illness after returning to civilian life, was acting abnormally in front of a convenience store in Phoenix, Arizona. As a result, he was taken into custody by law enforcement.

Cooperating peacefully, Marty soon found himself in an isolation cell after telling officers he was having suicidal thoughts.

However, while being fingerprinted, officers claimed he became combative — despite the fact that surveillance video shows no indication of any such behavior.

In any event, Marty was quickly surrounded by about eight police officers before being jumped, beaten, and Tasered with 50,000 volts, followed by 100 micropulses of 1,200 volts.

When the officers grew tired of brutalizing this U.S. veteran, he was stripped down and left naked on a cell floor.

Heart stopped, he remained motionless for nearly 10 minutes before someone tried to restart his heart. Four days later, Marty was taken off life support.

What a way to say “thank you” for honorably serving your country.

A Tough-Guy Patriot

The terror attack against Marty happened in a place where police brutality is quite common, as are unconstitutional searches and seizures.

But in Maricopa County, that seems to be OK. In fact, many actually support the man who

regularly violates constitutional rights in an attempt to combat illegal immigration, while bragging to the world that he's some kind of tough-guy patriot.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

The fact is Sheriff Joe Arpaio is little more than a treasonous bully who hides behind the guise of border security while trampling the rights of citizens.

Papers!

Known for “getting tough” on illegals, Sheriff Joe has become quite a rock star to those who believe it's perfectly acceptable to ignore the Bill of Rights if you're trying to secure the borders. And he has quite a following.

I must admit, it pains me to see U.S. citizens who call themselves “patriots” parading around in Gadsden flag t-shirts supporting Arpaio's illegal and unconstitutional law enforcement style.

Don't get me wrong; this nation is badly in need of real immigration reform. But like any kind of law enforcement, illegal immigration control and border security must not be done at the expense of our most basic rights. Otherwise, we're no better than the henchmen of Stalin and Mao who regularly demanded “papers” from citizens and often tortured and killed their own countrymen in an attempt to wave their iron fists.

So it is with great enthusiasm that I get to write this piece today.

Unconstitutional

It has long been known that Sheriff Joe relied on racial profiling and illegal detentions to target Latinos. And in Phoenix, Latinos make up about 25% of the population.

I'm not talking illegals, either. These are legal, U.S. citizens that are deserving of the same rights afforded to the rest of us under the U.S. Constitution.

But for Joe, that didn't matter. And his complete arrogance and disregard for liberty earned him a smackdown from a federal district court last week.

You see, last year a federal appeals court confirmed Arpaio could not detain people solely on the suspicion that they are illegals by disallowing the reversal of a lower court's ruling.

Then last week, U.S. District Judge G. Murray Snow issued a decision that found the policies and

practices of the Sheriff and his office are discriminatory and violate the Fourth and Fourteenth Amendments.

Attorney Cecilia Wang commented on the decision saying:

This is a victory for everyone. Singling people out for traffic stops and detentions because they are Latino is unconstitutional and just plain un-American. Let this be a warning to any agency trying to enforce the 'show me your papers' provision of SB 1070 and similar laws — there is no exception in the Constitution for immigration enforcement.

I realize there are plenty of folks out there who think Joe Arpaio is some kind of American hero with a John Wayne swagger and golden moral compass. But there is nothing moral about violating the rights of citizens.

Want to strengthen our borders? Fine. I'm with you. Border leaks certainly provide easy access for those wishing to wage war against the interests of our citizens. But remember, U.S. interests are rooted in freedom and liberty. Canceling out those interests in an effort to combat illegal immigration is counterproductive and completely destructive to the foundation of our constitutional rights.

Fake Patriots Unite

June 3, 2013

It takes more than a Gadsden flag t-shirt to be a freedom-loving patriot.

But don't tell that to the 200 people who recently "disliked" my article about an American sheriff who's been sidestepping the Bill of Rights in an effort to crack down on illegal immigration.

Last week I wrote a piece about Sheriff Joe Arpaio –the Arizona sheriff who has been illegally searching U.S. citizens that happen to look Latino. As a patriotic American, I have no patience for law enforcement officers who treat the Constitution as an afterthought. I don't care what color you are, to whom you pray (or don't pray) or who you vote for. If you are citizen of the United States, you are guaranteed certain rights that are not up for debate.

However, there were an awful lot of folks who read that article and decided that it is completely acceptable to ignore the Bill of Rights when seeking to protect our borders. My friends, it is absolutely illogical (and illegal) to trample the rights of citizens in an effort to "protect" citizens.

It is the Constitution that serves as our protector, not politicians and power-crazy law enforcement officials. And to disregard this truism is to disregard the foundation of our liberty.

Say what you want about illegal immigration, but the reality is that Sheriff Joe Arpaio has decided he is above the law. And if you truly believe in freedom and liberty for all citizens, then you cannot possibly support the actions of a man who treats the Constitution like a piece of toilet paper.

The Biggest Obama Scandal Yet

June 7, 2013

Monsanto execs say they are baffled by the reappearance of GMO “zombie wheat” in Oregon.

I guess by “baffled,” they mean they’re trying to figure a way to ensure they are not held liable for fouling up a small farmer’s land with an old version of the company’s unapproved genetically modified organism.

As reported by the USDA, a discovery of a wheat variety developed by Monsanto (which is resistant to its Roundup herbicide), was discovered on a small farm in Oregon. Yet no one seems to be sure how it got there.

I have my suspicions...

It’s no secret that the Obama administration has been very aggressive on maximizing agriculture exports. And I wouldn’t put it past this president to look the other way as his puppet masters contaminate our soil in an effort to juice up our wheat supplies. By any means necessary, right?

Unreal.

Of course, if this is the case, the plan clearly backfired.

Monsanto Screws Farmers — Again!

About 50% of the U.S. wheat crop is exported, and in Oregon, about 90% of all wheat is sent overseas.

But there is no country willing to import genetically-modified wheat from the United States. So it should come as no surprise that when the news broke of this rogue genetically-modified wheat strain, some countries shut down U.S. wheat imports immediately.

South Korea and Japan are the first, though I expect there will be more, which is certainly going to severely impact this \$8 billion wheat export business.

What a catastrophic mess.

As columnist Mike Adams recently pointed out, Monsanto is a ticking time bomb for U.S. agriculture:

This proves, without any question, that Monsanto's genetic experiments which "escaped" into commercial wheat fields are now going to devastate U.S. wheat farmers. Expect the floor to drop out on wheat prices, and watch for a huge backlash against the USDA by U.S. farmers who stand to lose hundreds of millions of dollars on this.

As the USDA has now admitted, Monsanto's GMO experiments from 1998 — 2005 were held in open wheat fields. The genetically engineered wheat escaped and found its way into commercial wheat fields in Oregon (and possibly 15 other states), causing self-replicating genetic pollution that now taints the entire U.S. wheat industry.

Of course, the USDA is looking into it. Which basically means nothing will happen, and no one will be forced to take responsibility for potentially gutting wheat exports and poisoning our food supply.

Monsanto's Personal Whore

The USDA says it's investigating the issue, but how do you think that's going to pan out?

After all, the USDA is pretty much run by Monsanto.

Hell, the entire United States government has been infected with Monsanto shills. The company has actually had insiders working alongside lawmakers at the Department of Commerce, the Department of Defense, the State Department, the Food and Drug Administration, the EPA, the Supreme Court, and the White House.

But make no mistake; the Obama administration has been the biggest whore for Monsanto yet.

Don't forget that just a couple of months ago, President Obama signed HR 933 into law and officially gave Monsanto the right to poison your food without ever having to fear legal action.

Hidden in the text of the Farmer Assurance Provision of HR 933, you can find a biotech rider that gives Monsanto the freedom to contaminate any farm in the United States without any type of legal accountability.

Heather Callaghan over at Activist Post spelled out the whole evil agenda perfectly. In regards to what has been called "The Monsanto Protection Act," Callaghan writes:

"The USDA already gives biotech companies like Monsanto the thumbs up, trusting Monsanto's own safety evaluations. Now the court system cannot intervene, which could prove detrimental to farmers who are sued by Monsanto for patent

infringement when their GM seeds contaminate those farmers' fields.”

As pointed out in a recent piece in the *International Business Times*, this sets a precedent that suggests court challenges are now a privilege, not a right.

I don't care which side of the aisle you call home — there is a very real and very dangerous connection between the Obama administration and Monsanto.

I'd even go as far to say it is a treasonous one as it puts our health, our safety, and our economy at risk.

President Obama has kicked and screamed about coal-fired power plant pollution but has turned a blind eye to the highly unethical and very serious pollution of our food supply.

As far as I'm concerned, this is a bigger scandal than Benghazi –and should be treated as such.

Morality is Dying

July 19, 2013

A lot of folks have asked me to weigh in on the Trayvon Martin case. But there's not much to say, really.

Guilty or not guilty, violence, racism, and intolerance will not go gently into that good night. Not here, not anywhere. Don't kid yourself; the United States does not have a monopoly on these types of things.

In any event, it doesn't matter what I think about this case. A young boy is dead and our nation is more divided than ever. Although the amount of media attention this particular case received has really surprised me, and it got me thinking: "What if the media covered other worthwhile news stories the way they covered the Zimmerman trial?"

What If...

There's no doubt in my mind that mainstream media sources are little more than tools of the establishment. They facilitate the illusion of choice by choosing sides, right vs. left, and pinning the two against each other. It makes for great television, and it certainly puts the asses in the seats and money in the bank. But what if the media, just over the past few weeks, had covered some other pressing events instead of the Zimmerman trial?

What if the media covered the connection between the White House and Monsanto like they did the Zimmerman trial?

What if, instead of a hooded black kid getting shot by a wannabe vigilante with a hard-on for Charles Bronson movies, the media focused on the president of the United States and his connection with a company that is slowly destroying our ability to protect and preserve the soils in which we grow our food?

The same company that "accidentally" contaminated wheat crops to the point where they're no longer being accepted by some of this nation's largest trading partners, thereby costing American farmers millions in lost business... the same company that bullies small family farmers with armies of lawyers and teams of cockroach lobbyists.

What if the media covered the hundreds of Americans being shot or killed every single day by an unethical drug war like they did the Zimmerman trial?

George Zimmerman was charged with killing a 17-year-old boy. Do you know how many

17-year-old boys are murdered every single day in this country as a result of what has now become a more than \$1 trillion war on drugs?

And what about the corrupt private prison companies?

The corporations that make billions of dollars off the backs of taxpayers by going out of their way to incarcerate as many Americans as possible, regardless of whether or not they are guilty or innocent?

What if the media gave the same amount of attention to each individual soldier who has been killed in the Middle East over some bullshit war that never should've been started in the first place, much less continued under this administration?

Well, they couldn't do that. There simply isn't enough time in the day.

And that alone is a tragedy of massive proportions.

Seven Dangers to Human Virtue

Of course, I don't mean to trivialize the shooting of Trayvon Martin. Such a tragic death of an American citizen is not something that should just be shrugged off.

But as the debates and hateful rhetoric from both sides continue to fan the flames of intolerance, other Americans are being slaughtered. Whether these deaths are drug-related, health-related, or war-related, no loss of life should be boiled down to a simplistic debate on a cable "news" show.

Although these days, it seems that's all we get — almost in an effort to get us to accept immorality as the cultural norm.

Hey, it brings in advertisers, that's for sure. And certainly oppressive governments find it hard to thrive where morality is expected and embraced.

So maybe one way to fight tyranny is by valuing all life while steering clear of what Mahatma Gandhi called the seven dangers to human virtue:

1. Wealth without work
2. Pleasure without conscience
3. Knowledge without character
4. Business without ethics

5. Science without humanity
6. Religion without sacrifice
7. Politics without principle

Just something to think about the next time you find yourself pulled into a debate over the next heavily publicized tragedy designed to divide us instead of unite us.

Speak Loudly and Carry a Twig

July 24, 2013

Last week, South Carolina Senator Lindsey Graham suggested that the United States should boycott the 2014 Olympics if Russia grants asylum to Edward Snowden.

Not long after those words hit the Internet, Graham was attacked by both the left and the right for being, well, kind of an idiot. In fact, Fox News anchor Alisyn Camerota asked the Senator about this in the following interview:

LG: “You don’t want to punish athletes – they’ve done nothing wrong – but do I really want to reward Putin if he continues to do what he’s doing? Should we reward this country by allowing him to have the propaganda coup of hosting the Olympics?”

AC: “How does that hurt Putin?”

LG: “I think it would really matter to the Russians. Should we have given Hitler the Olympics in 1936? I’m not suggesting Russia is Nazi Germany. Alisyn, would you go to the Olympic games in Iran? Look what Hitler did in 1936. They sold to the world something they were not. Like it or not, the Olympic Games are used by the host country to sell themselves. Should we be part of selling Russia for Putin? If he gives Snowden asylum, should we give our Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval on the games that he will be hosting? I don’t want to stop the Olympics, I want to stop Putin.”

Clearly Graham has not received the memo that honey-badger Putin doesn’t give a shit.

Of course, it seems Graham’s too busy these days preparing for his next election by pumping out the empty rhetoric for which so many senators just like him are so famous. Case in point: Yesterday the Senator told an audience of partisan sheep that if the relationship between the U.S. and Iran doesn’t improve by the end of summer, he will ask Congress to authorize going to war.

He knows that’ll never happen, but it makes for a great opportunity to fire up his supporters who haven’t yet figured out that starting yet another war is not in our best interests. That being said, if Graham is serious about going to war with Iran, I suggest he volunteer right now to go over there and fire the first shot –in person, and not from the safety of a climate-controlled drone command center.

How to Silence the Press

September 30, 2013

At this very moment, there are 20 senators who have intentionally signed on to dismantle the First Amendment. I'm completely serious.

Introduced on May 16 by Chuck Schumer and Lindsey Graham, the Free Flow of Information Act made its first appearance.

Also known as the innocuous-sounding Senate Bill 987, the Free Flow of Information Act is described by the Senate as a bill to maintain the free flow of information to the public by providing conditions for the federally compelled disclosure of information by certain persons connected with the news media.

Let me translate for you...

This bill ensures that only those in the media whom the government deems worthy of being called journalists can be protected by the First Amendment.

So if you happen to be an investigative blogger that uncovers a dirty politician taking bribes to pass or vote against a particular bill, God help you if someone on the Hill gets wind of it... Your ass will be locked up in no time, and you'll be reporting on life as a prison boy — because you don't have the official government seal of journalistic approval.

At what point did any of these guys decide that the government has any business effectively licensing reporters?

A Privileged Club for Journalists

There's an excellent piece on this by legal scholar Carey Shenkman, in which Shenkman writes:

On September 12, 2013, the U.S. Senate Judiciary committee narrowly defined who the law should consider to be a journalist, by amending the proposed Free Flow of Information Act ("FFIA"). The FFIA is a "shield law" that protects journalists from having to reveal their confidential sources when confronted with court subpoenas. The amendment changed the language of the bill from protecting the activity of journalism to protecting the profession. Journalists are now limited to those employed by, recently employed by, or substantially contributing to media organizations for certain minimum durations.

This maneuver skirts the substantial investigative role served by independent

journalists, bloggers, and nontraditional media, who are left unprotected by the statute. It also expressly excludes whistleblower organizations. By not extending protection to a vital segment of investigative newsgatherers, the amended FFIA falls short of providing real benefits. More fundamentally, the distinctions created by the bill reinforce a privileged club for journalists. In essence, the government is licensing the press, and treading down a path that courts have for decades cautioned “present[s] practical and conceptual difficulties of a high order.”

Brilliant!

Do NOT Stand for This!

Interestingly, the first introduction of this bill back in 2007 was fully supported by one of the key figures behind the dismantling of the Second Amendment: Senator Dianne Feinstein.

That bill died in committee, but Schumer and Graham took up the bill this year, proving once again that there really is little difference between the elephant and the jackass... Nearly all are on the take, and nearly all prefer authoritarianism over freedom and liberty.

This may be a tough pill to swallow for some, but it’s a reality nonetheless.

Recently Senator Feinstein said she’d continue to support the bill, as long as it includes language that excludes those who, as she said, “are not reporters at all.”

Senator Schumer jumped in, saying: “We’re very careful in this bill to distinguish journalists from those who shouldn’t be protected, WikiLeaks and all those, and we’ve ensured that.”

In other words, those organizations that are a threat to a government agenda designed to limit your constitutional rights — while continuing to feed the special interests that essentially dictate all policy now... those organizations are not protected.

They will likely be targeted by lawmakers who think they have the right and even the authority to trivialize our precious liberty.

Don’t think for a second that I’m standing for this clear violation of the First Amendment, which, as you know, protects against the infringement on the freedom of the press. And those lawmakers who support this bill should be held accountable for their very intentional attempt to facilitate this violation by signing on as co-sponsors. As far as I’m concerned, this folks are committing a treasonous act.

I'm Bullish on Organic Marijuana

January 14, 2014

I don't smoke pot.

I don't necessarily have a problem with it, and quite frankly it's absolutely ridiculous that it's illegal. In fact, I would argue that the U.S. War on Drugs has been one of the most destructive and futile wars ever waged.

I also believe that marijuana absolutely serves a medicinal role for many people suffering from a variety of ailments. To deny a sick person a simple, natural cure is immoral, no matter how you try to justify it.

All this being said, to assume that marijuana is completely harmless is a myth.

Bad Weed

You see, much of today's marijuana is grown with the assistance of pesticides. And according to chemist Jeffrey Raber from the University of Southern California, as much as 70% of the pesticides found in marijuana is inhaled when smoked.

The Eureka Times-Standard reported on Raber's findings, writing...

“I think that what's so alarming to us is that such a huge amount of pesticide material could be transferred,” Raber said. “And, you have to consider that when you inhale (something), it's much like injecting it directly into your blood stream.”

Raber said it's important to remember that smoking a marijuana bud that's been sprayed with chemicals is far different than eating a non-organic tomato. First and foremost, he said, there are no controls over what's sprayed on marijuana crops. And while most people would rinse off a tomato before eating it, they can't wash a bud before putting it in their pipe. The body also has filters in place for things that are ingested, he said, but not for what's inhaled.

“You don't have the first pass metabolism of the liver,” he said. “You don't have the lack of absorptivity going through the stomach or the gut lining. It's a very different equation when you're inhaling.”

I always find it a bit disturbing when I see so many folks singing the praises of healthy, organic food, but then going off to smoke weed that's loaded with all kinds of chemicals.

You won't eat a conventionally-grown cantaloupe, but you'll smoke weed that could possibly contain pesticide residues at levels 1,600 times the legal digestible amount?

Health, Liberty and Opportunity

The truth is, I see non-organically grown marijuana as a very real health issue that few are talking about –especially those in Colorado still doing backflips over the fact that they can now buy an ounce of pot without being treated like a violent criminal.

While I understand the enthusiasm, marijuana advocates shouldn't turn a blind eye to the pesticide issue, particularly if they want to further proclaim the medicinal benefits of the plant.

Of course, there are legal organic growers out there, looking to capitalize on this reality.

After doing a quick Google search, I came across a number of dispensaries that provide organic medical cannabis. Although much like with your food, it's always good to do your due diligence first, just to make sure those who claim organic status are actually adhering to organic standards.

Still, just like the organic food sector, I believe there's an enormous opportunity waiting to explode in organically-grown and produced marijuana.

The long path to legalization is well underway, and it won't be long before most state lawmakers realize that bullying responsible adults wishing to grow, purchase, smoke or eat marijuana is not only an exercise in futility, but anti-liberty as well, as it doesn't allow for folks to exercise personal responsibility without the shadow of Big Government following your every move.

And let's face it: the War on Drugs has been one of the biggest anti-free market operations in this nation's history.

In any event, for those who value liberty, the decriminalization and legalization of marijuana is a positive development.

For those who use marijuana for medicinal purposes, you would be wise to seek out only marijuana that has been grown and produced organically. Otherwise, you're simply treating one condition while potentially exposing yourself to another.

And for investors, if you happen to come across an opportunity to invest in an organic marijuana operation, don't be so quick to blow it off. Do your due diligence, of course. But don't immediately chalk it up to some random hippie illusion, because it could end up being a multi-million dollar opportunity.

Don't Sweat the Debt, it's Darwin Day!

January 30, 2014

In the next 60 seconds, nearly \$3 million will be added to the national debt.

Today, at least one American child will be murdered as a result of the U.S. War on Drugs.

This week, the same people responsible for bringing the global economy to the brink will continue to get rich off the backs of U.S. taxpayers.

This month, hundreds of American citizens will have their constitutional rights violated by overzealous law enforcement professionals; the Fed will continue to destroy the dollar; and more of our children will go to bed cold, hungry and uneducated.

Of course, all of these issues really amount to very little compared to one of the biggest burdens placed on all of us today...

The lack of a celebration for Charles Darwin. (Sarcasm intended)

It has recently been brought to my attention that Rep. Rush Holt of New Jersey has re-introduced a resolution to celebrate the anniversary of the birth of Charles Darwin and recognize the importance of science in the betterment of humanity.

Look, I'm an evolution guy all the way (although I refuse to trivialize the rights of others that find solace in creationism). But there isn't a single valid reason Rep. Holt should be wasting taxpayer dollars to re-introduce this nonsense.

Not only is it unethical to do such a thing while there are clearly more important fish to fry, but it's just kind of rude.

This is nothing more than a childish act of thumbing his nose at those with whom he disagrees. How professional!

Then there's Roy Speckhardt, executive director of the American Humanist Association who was recently quoted saying: "Too many people are being influenced by the dangerous creationism and so-called intelligent design movements, and it's time for others in Congress to stand up for true science."

No, Roy, it's time for Congress and the president to get our fiscal house in order, stop placing the burden of mounting U.S. debt on taxpayers, and stay true to their job, which is to defend and protect the Constitution.

Speckhardt seems to cheer on Rep. Holt's actions, but I'd be willing to bet that if someone in Congress started talking about a resolution to celebrate the anniversary of the birth of a famous Christian saint, he'd be the first guy to pitch a fit.

Also consider that while Charles Darwin's contributions to science will always rank pretty damn high, he's not the only brilliant scientist to have had a major impact on society.

Should we also introduce resolutions to celebrate the lives of Isaac Newton, Albert Einstein, Galileo, Marie Curie, Edwin Hubble, Alfred Kinsey, and Archimedes?

I tell ya, if these guys in Congress had to hold real jobs and pulled this kind of crap, they'd be in the unemployment line.

Enough with the posturing already. It gets worse and worse every year, and it gets us nowhere.

If you want to debate evolution vs. creationism, do it on your own time –and not on the taxpayer's dime!

Are Voter ID Laws Unconstitutional?

April 30, 2014

Yesterday, a federal judge put the kibosh on Wisconsin's voter identification law, which would require that voters show a state-issued photo ID at the polls.

I have to admit, this is a tough one for me.

My instincts tell me that such a law is, in fact, unconstitutional as it violates the Fourteenth Amendment which clearly states that no state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States.

That being said, I don't necessarily see requiring voters to provide ID as that big of a deal. You need an ID to buy alcohol or drive a car. Why shouldn't you have to prove you are who say you are when you cast your vote?

Of course, the whole debate is pretty much bullshit anyway. We know that there are barely enough instances of voter fraud to make this a priority. And anyone who thinks this isn't a political maneuver is foolish.

The Republicans want it in place because it'll help deter minorities, who don't typically vote along the same lines as the GOP. Democrats don't want it in place because they rely on minorities for votes as Democrats tend to be quite good at fooling minorities into believing they actually have their best interests in mind. By the way, they don't!

Now some backers of voter identification laws argue that these laws will help boost public confidence in the integrity of the election process. But the way I see it, this just helps further expose the lack of integrity of the two-party system that lives and dies by these kinds of bipartisan shenanigans. And that's actually a good thing.

Regardless of how this all plays out, you can be sure of this: When it comes to fraud, I'm much more concerned about our lawmakers than I am about the folks who elect them.

Mother Nature Doesn't Need a Government Handout

July 18, 2014

A new study released by researchers at Newcastle University concludes that switching to organic food provides as many additional antioxidants as eating between one and two extra portions of fruits and vegetables.

How is this possible?

Because these researchers have discovered that organic fruits and vegetables boast more antioxidants than non-organically grown fruits and vegetables.

Of course, for every study that suggests organic produce is healthier, there's another that suggests there's no difference at all. Certainly I hear this plenty from those who mock my decision to fuel my body primarily with organic food. But that means little to me, because here's the bottom line...

Mother Nature is smarter than all of us, and I trust her a lot more with my food than anyone else.

Absolute Certainty

I can't say with absolute certainty that organic food is healthier. But I feel a hell of a lot safer eating it than something that hasn't been grown organically. And while some may call this paranoia, I call it the application of the precautionary principle.

I don't know what the long-term health effects could be from eating GMO corn or baby spinach sprayed with pesticides. But neither do the folks who claim non-organic foods are completely safe.

Look at it like this...

If I grow organic lettuce in my garden, I know that when I pick it, wash it and eat it. it will nourish my body and not put me at risk of any major diseases. This is not something I can say with absolute certainty with regard to non-organic lettuce.

This doesn't mean non-organic lettuce will make you sick. But there's really no way to know for certain. And let's be honest, it's not as if the companies that manufacture these pesticides, the biotech firms that create Roundup-ready GMO corn, and the lawmakers that give these folks special treatment in exchange for campaign contributions are known for being forthright and

honest.

Truth is, the halls of Congress are crawling with Big Ag and biotech lobbyists whose only job is to make sure the government allows them to dictate food policy, thereby ensuring the absence of a real, honest free market.

You Scratch My Back...

The bottom line is that most of these Big Ag and biotech firms rely on this system of mutual back-scratching for a steady diet of subsidies that ensure growth and profitability –subsidies, by the way, that have cost taxpayers more than \$256 billion since 1995. That’s billion, with a “B.” And these subsidies are funneled right into the pockets of the Big Ag and biotech firms, not small organic farmers.

In a real free market, where businesses live and die by their ability to meet consumer demand without a government handout, most of the companies in question would have a very hard time surviving.

If I can’t trust these guys to sell me a head of lettuce at a competitive price without the help of a bunch of sketchy lawmakers and lobbyists, how can I trust them to ensure that what I’m eating is safe?

On the flip side, Mother Nature doesn’t need a damn thing from Washington. Hell, she was around long before there was even a government teat on which to suckle.

Look, I’m not saying you should or shouldn’t eat organic food. That’s your decision. But I’ll tell you this: Mother Nature doesn’t need my tax dollars, nor does she lobby to get them.

That right there is reason enough for every tax-paying citizen to support the growers of organic food here in the U.S. And who knows? As a bonus, you may even become healthier.

Epilogue

The intention of this book was never to lay down a list of ultimate solutions to our many environmental and social problems. Instead, it was to provide a starting point for a rational conversation about how these problems can be solved either with limited government or in the absence of government altogether.

I also wanted to present arguments in support of our individual responsibilities to maintaining a healthy planet. It should not be the job of politicians to ensure we all have access to safe water, clean air, and healthy soil. These are things that we need to live and, therefore, that we should seek to protect and preserve on our own. Personal sovereignty, property rights, and a real free market, free from government interference, can help us accomplish this.

The bottom line is that it is in all of our best interests to tune out the media sound bites and partisan divides and focus on truth: We inhabit one planet together. In order for us to ensure our viability as a species, we must ensure the viability of our home. It's that simple.