

Our system is socialism for the rich, the powerful, the privileged

Written by By Mike Daly Guest Columnist
Friday, 04 September 2020 05:14



Part two of two

Members of the hardworking middle class have no one lobbying for them so they end up with fewer jobs, jobs which pay less and which are often part time with limited benefits. Meanwhile their expenses skyrocket such as college tuition, state and local taxes and healthcare costs when not subsidized by the government.

Imagine the cost savings if regulators worried about real safety hazards and truly corrupt business arrangements rather than effecting social change through EPA and presidential dicta. Just this week the EPA is rolling back methane leak rules for oil and gas while the Wall Street Journal reports [8/11, page A3] that Antarctica's ice shelves are melting faster than they are being replaced. If regulators were on the ball, taxes could be lowered, capital would efficiently flow into projects yielding positive returns and employment would expand with higher wages as the real economy grew. Who knows, it might help offset the bursting of the stock-market bubble when the Fed stops smothering the interest rates.

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Wall Street and special-interest groups utilize unlimited lobbyist funding to get Washington to come up with programs for industry after industry. The home-building industry, the oil and gas industry, the timber industry, the medical industry, the agricultural industry, the publishing industry – the list is endless – get what they want by warping capitalism to their will through the use of money and political power.

The American version of free enterprise as practiced today is truly a form of socialism for the rich, the powerful, and the privileged: those not only too big to fail, but too powerful to tax and too strong to have their targeted loopholes shut down. These plutocrats control those in Washington who are supposed to represent us.

What we have is an inbred and self-perpetuating political elite that rules for their benefit not ours. Meanwhile our nation is coming apart. Our wages since 1970 have flat lined. We have nearly 13.6 million single parents raising 21 million children.

Nearly 700,000 children are abused in the U.S. each year. Last year New Mexico Children, Youth and Families Department spent \$150 million to remove 10,000 children from unsafe homes. In 2016 there were over 600,000 abortions performed in the U.S. Forty-six percent of the population owns guns.

Thirty three thousand people are killed every year by guns. We have the highest incarceration rate in the world. Too much of our society suffers from dysfunction, discontent and perversity. We are engaged in feckless warmongering, at war since WWII, with only infrequent and short interludes.

The system is rigged. We have a government of the rich, by the rich and for the rich.

Trump's question: "are you satisfied with the direction that the country is taking?" resonated with many Americans. In Trump's message MAGA, "again" was a powerful motivator. A plurality of Americans, more than voted for either candidate, decided not to vote at all. Over 95 million voters stayed home rather than vote in 2016.

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That is one and one-half times more than voted for either Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton. Clinton got 60.1 million votes while 59.8 million voted for Trump.

Big money is not through with us. They want more power. Of course Donald Trump wants to be a dictator, but Big Money wants more power – by disenfranchising the citizens of America. This is a multifaceted attack on our democracy.

The documentary *Slay the Dragon* [Apple TV, Prime Video, Google Play, FandangoNOW, Vudu, Redbox On Demand] deftly outlines how redistricting has destroyed by degrees American democracy and how some Americans are fighting back. Many states have their legislatures draw up districts every ten years. This is how districts are determined in New Mexico. And of course the majority party in power at the time attempts to carve out a better portion for itself.

In 21 states the district drawing is in the hands of a bipartisan citizen commission. The story in the movie shows the criminal determination of a Republican group to illegally shift voting boundaries in a number of states so that Republicans would be sure to win. This effort, costing about \$30 million, was largely financed by WalMart and the national Chamber of Commerce. The hard fought battle made it to the U.S. Supreme Court and in Michigan a citizens group led a successful grassroots campaign to put Michigan's district drawing into the hands of a bipartisan citizen commission.

Citizens can effect substantial change when organized and motivated.

Another movie, *The Laundromat*, starring Meryl Streep, Antonio Banderas, Sharon Stone and others, is a plea for control of lobbyists. Many of the world's most wealthy and powerful people manage to stay that way in part because of legal loopholes and offshore banks that allow them to evade paying taxes. Their behavior has widespread and devastating effects, as the world learned in 2016 when the leaked [*Panama Papers*](#) were published. The *Panama Papers* comprise more than 11 million documents.

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Now, as we move into the fall elections and voting by mail has become all the more important, the Trump Administration has installed a new Postmaster who has unveiled a sweeping overhaul of the nation's mail service and has displaced much of the existing leadership. He is also overseeing the removal of mail sorting equipment from post offices – a surefire way to slow down the mail. All in time for the November elections. Americans, I don't think now is the time to wait and see, its time to act.

With so much effort expended to derail voting, it must mean that your vote really does count. Register and vote!

Many consider Donald Trump to be a disaster. But the illness that affects our democracy is something he took tactical advantage of. When Donald Trump is gone, the malaise that affects us will not go away. Only when we get the politicians to attend to their constituents can we expect things to improve.

So "dark money" is not the problem, it's the money. The only way we are going to save our nation is by very strong restrictions on campaign finance. Some suggestions are presented here – difficult, but not impossible. Consider the following as pointers for a more comprehensive plan.

Constitutional Amendment [to overrule the Supreme Court] allowing strong restrictions on donations of any sort to our representatives. Public funding of elections so our elected officials can get back to work.

Limit donations to candidates and office holders to come from constituents only. Allow only people, not institutions of any kind to contribute. Publicly funded elections with dollars only coming from constituents would be a strong encouragement for candidates and office holders to meet and respond to those very people they are elected to represent.

In my own view only citizens in the district the officeholder represents should be allowed to contribute to the campaign. Professor Lawrence Lessig of Harvard suggested public financing of campaigns. His plan is that each citizen be given a \$50 chit and that they can "spend" all or part of it on any candidate. So you would be free to give \$40 to the Trump Campaign and \$10 to support Ben Ray Lujan.

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Or you could say I don't like any candidate and retain all the money. Unfortunately, Professor Lessig associated his campaign with liberal issues thus turning off the majority of Republican, Libertarian and conservative voters who overwhelmingly want reform. With public financing of elections, candidates and officeholders would be required to run on the funds they receive from their constituents, requiring them to contact you, not a lobbyist, with information about their doings.

This problem I am describing with money influence is an issue that affects all Americans and we need to change the playbook so that it is a nation of the people, by the people and for the people. I suggest those who find this statement compelling consider writing your views here in the *Gallup Sun* in the form of a letter to the editor and [take any] other action you deem appropriate.

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