

COMMON SENSE II

Capitalizing on the familiarity and influence of Thomas Paine's "Common Sense" pamphlets that provided American colonists with exposure to the conversation of great thinkers in the pre-Revolutionary period, this paper assumes the name COMMON SENSE II. Similarly, today's series of pamphlets strives to give a direct response to great political events and ideas of our time.

September 2020

Today's World Issue

Vol. 15 Issue 9

"Be Afraid...Be Very Afraid"

By Vicki Andrews

"Be afraid, be very afraid." That phrase has been running through my brain lately; I can't imagine why. All we are facing is a major pandemic, the existential threat of climate change, exploding racial inequality, and increasing hostility between people on the right and the left. (Is there anyone left in the middle anymore?) By the way, we are also facing what may be the most important election of our country's history. Why should we feel afraid? Everything will be all right, won't it?

Well, not necessarily. I just watched *Democracy Now*, a progressive news program featuring Amy Goodman. Today's episode included an interview with Barton Gellman, a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, on his recent article in *The Atlantic*, "The Election That Could Break America: Inside How Trump and McConnell Could Steal the Vote," as well as Bernie Sanders on "How to Block Trump from Stealing the Election and Preserve American Democracy." I would recommend this particular episode to anyone who wants a clear idea of what's at stake in this election. You can view it online at DemocracyNow.org (9/25/20 episode) or on YouTube. Just don't watch it before bedtime.

Donald Trump has refused to say he'll accept the results of the election if Biden wins. He is convincing his supporters of so-called fraudulent use of mail-in ballots, and his supporters are listening, believing, and cheering him on. Donald Trump, Jr. states that the radical left "are laying the groundwork to steal this election from my father. They are planting stories that President Trump will have a landslide lead on election night but will

lose when they finish counting the mail-in ballots. Their plan is to add millions of fraudulent ballots that can cancel your vote and overturn the election. We cannot let that happen. We need every able-bodied man, woman [*Sic.*] to join the Army for Trump's election security Operation." Gellman goes on to state that the Trump campaign and the Republicans are recruiting what they're calling an "army for Trump of 15,000 or so volunteers who will monitor security of the polls, and that means going into Democratic areas and looking for suspicious people."

No, don't worry; nothing to be afraid of here. We'll be OK if we don't look suspicious. Anyway, I do think we need to be aware of what we're facing and educate ourselves on what may be planned. What the answer is, I don't know. But I do believe we're better off if we're aware and prepared.

If you watch this episode of *Democracy Now*, I'd also recommend you watch the final interview, which is "Without Love, We Won't Make It" by Bishop Curry, on the need for loving and caring for one another and what's at stake in November.

By the way, the origin of the quote, "Be afraid, be very afraid" is from the 1986 horror film, *The Fly*. It was used as a tag line in the publicity flyers and has come to be used as a warning when danger is imminent.



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<https://cinematicrandomness.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Fly-The-Cover.png>

No Trump

By Bob Passi

The Democratic Party in this coming election seems to be set on a campaign strategy of “no Trump,” implying that whatever kind of alternative the Democratic Party offers will be better than four more years of Trump. They continue to provide arguments and compile evidence and statistics to show how destructive the Trump Presidency has been over the past four years and how some of his most destructive policies and plans will be changed when the Democrats win. However, there is little momentum or passion connected with those words and statistics, as though everyone will simply see that anything is better than four more years of Trump.

What the Democratic Presidential campaign does not emphasize is any clear vision about what new direction the nation will have to take, not only to deal with future pandemics, but also to deal with the looming effects of climate change. Much of this is about the unwillingness to question the assumptions of the extreme fundamentalist economic theories which have come to dominate the US and the entire planet, making wealth the means of determining worth and any hope of access to the necessities of life. The resulting monetizing of life and its resources has led to huge income inequalities as well as the undermining of the structure of democracy. That economic ideology has destroyed the foundations of social justice and the basic human services needed to deal with climate disasters and health challenges.

One might think about this strategy as being like a no-trump strategy in bridge, the card game. First is the continuing desire to see the entire electoral process as an old-politics game, easily forgetting the human toll of the potential outcomes. But back to bridge, the no-trump bid is about not holding enough cards in any one suit to be able to win, and since you hold high cards in several suits, you think you can take enough tricks to win without having just one winning suit. In other words, you do not declare yourself with any one suit. That means that all suits are of equal value for that hand.

If we might translate that into politics and see the suits as representing different political positions, the red hearts and diamonds are the more human

and liberal grassroots side of politics. The black clubs and spades are the more conservative, top-down, more authority-based side of politics.

If you follow a no-trump strategy, you try to meld the two sides together, offering some of each so you can operate in any of the suits, offering something to everyone. In other words, you do not actually have to commit to any one direction, the problem is that your commitment ends up being rather amorphous and simply taking enough tricks is the goal.

Back to politics now: An anyone-but-Trump approach does not inspire much passion for any major change and suggests that simply going back to the old normal of the Obama years will be enough to deal with the new realities and the extreme challenges we now face. Trump can always induce passion by playing to the frustrations and fears that exist within the society and by insisting that the old ways are tired and outmoded and not up to the challenges of the new realities.



The gamble is that there will be enough anti-Trump sentiment to carry the no-trump bid and that even those who support the darker suits will see the wisdom of defeating Trump, while those on the progressive side will not get too distracted by the lack of enthusiasm for the changes and the social transformation necessary to create a sustainable human future.

Do the Democrats hold enough of the right cards? If the old politics formula is still true, that money is the determining factor in elections, then the Democrats may do just fine. However, no one knows what strings are attached to that money. The other old measure is about the coverage by the mainstream media, which seems to be quite extensive. Will the voting public see those two cards of money and media as being enough to convince them to go back to the old ways of a kinder and gentler future with no major shifts except some moderate changes in approach?

I remain skeptical. This is too much like the Democratic Party in 2016 with their overconfident support

(Continued on page 3)



https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/45/Ace_of_No-Trumps.png

Choosing a Future

By Bob Passi

We are continually choosing the future we prefer with our opinions, with our actions, and even with our stubbornness and whims. We can try to convince others to agree with us with information and facts, with passion, or even with force and intimidation. We can accept the decisions of the society, or we can resist what others see as the best course, or we can become obstructionist.

In a democracy these things are decided by discussion and vote.



<https://mrcglass.files.wordpress.com/2018/01/mandela.jpg?w=300&h=291>

If we want to continue being a democracy, we are obliged to go along with those decisions. To the degree that we refuse, we begin the slide away from democracy toward authoritarianism, chaos, and anarchy.

Democracy is more than voting for leaders; it is about how effectively those leaders represent the citizenry's needs in dealing with the realities of the world.

Rights derive from responsibilities. If you do not accept the basic responsibilities of citizen-



<https://fabiusmaximus.files.wordpress.com/2012/08/the-future-is-ours.png>

ship in a democracy, you cannot claim any rights. Rights are not an entitlement but a reward for supporting the processes of democracy.

We are at one of those moments in our national history in which we must choose between two very different paths forward. One is about choosing to unify in a democracy to resolve the

existential problems of the COVID-19 virus and a planet beginning to spin out of control with unattended climate changes. Or we can choose a future in which we opt for guns and force as a solution to perceived threats and feed a continuing confrontation and obstruct any hope of solutions. Let us hope we can find the wisdom to put our differences aside, come together to heal our democracy, and find workable solutions to create a sustainable future for all of us—and perhaps for the planet.



<https://internetmonk.com/wp-content/uploads/future-vision1.jpg>

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Hillary Clinton (see *Saving Democracy: The 2016 Presidential Election*). Trying to be all things to all people and not to rock the economic boat does not engage too many hearts and minds. I believe it would be a mistake to underestimate the ability of the Trump faction to create enough momentum for his re-election if the Democrats do not provide a clear and compelling alternative vision and pathway back to a sustainable democracy.

What is missing is a powerful vision for a sustainable future that will capture the hearts and minds of the citizenry. Where is the bold new vision that will inspire us to transform our society in time to meet the existential challenges with which we are now confronted? Even if their gamble pays off, where does that leave us for a vision of a vibrant and viable future?

The simple no-trump gamble may not be the best tactic for these times.

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The End of Social Security

By Nancy Rudd

A good government treats its most vulnerable citizens with compassion and caring. During the pandemic that we will live through for almost another year, those 65 years and older and those with pre-existing conditions are more likely to get COVID-19. In 46 days from September 18, 2020, the people of the United States will have elected a President. (The results may not be final, but the voting will be over.)

In the meantime, many of the seniors in our country live only on their Social Security income. Their medical coverage is Medicare and possibly a supplemental policy. Donald Trump has done it again. He has issued an executive order instructing the Treasury Department to stop collecting payroll taxes. Those are the taxes employed people pay into to Social Security and Medicare funds. Ostensibly, this is to help those unemployed by the pandemic meet their financial obligations. Trump calls this directive a “tax holiday” for four months—September 1 to December 31. This is allowed under the Internal Revenue Code if a disaster is declared. If it’s a tax holiday, employees will have to pay everything back if he isn’t re-elected. He has said if he were re-elected, he would make the order permanent.

The amount of FICA, or Federal Insurance Contributions Act, currently is 6.2% for Social Security and 1.45% for Medicare. This is taken out of an employee’s paycheck. The employer pays the same amounts on the employee’s wages. The total is 15.3% for both employee and employer.

If re-elected, Trump will kill two of the greatest social safety nets for seniors. They were enacted by Democratic Presidents: Franklin Delano Roosevelt (Social Security) and Lyndon Johnson (Medicare). They are NOT entitlements, as most Republicans call them. Seniors pay into the programs with a lifetime of work.

The chief actuary of the Social Security Administration estimated that if payroll tax contributions stopped on January 1, 2021, those on Social Security Disability Insurance would not receive any more benefits by the middle of 2021, and the rest of those on Social Security would see their payments disappear two years later in



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2023.

According to Nancy Altman, a lawyer and president of Social Security Works, Congress could only stop Trump by passing a veto-proof law, something she believes is highly unlikely. The IRS code allows deferrals of the payroll tax for up to one year, and with the declaration of a new disaster, Trump could defer payments for an additional year, thus assuring the bankruptcy of the funds. Trump isn’t beyond declaring another emergency disaster—or creating a disaster so that he can declare one. Remember the boarder wall?



<http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-4h81mpPCZY/UUoyVc5gDyI/AAAAAAAAAY1A/Y90BrUaqYUs/s1600/Social+Security+&+Medicare+are+not+entitlements.jpg>

Trump believes that employees who have the extra money from this defunding will help the economy. It’s also questionable whether this executive order is legal. He says that this “will have no effect on Social Security and Medicare.” He says it will be reimbursed from the general fund, and Congress will do it. It’s highly unlikely that this would happen. The deficit is already very large from the 2017 Republican tax cut for billionaires and the spending for the pandemic. Reimbursing the general fund to make up for defunding Social Security and Medicare would amount to over \$1 TRILLION per year!

It is imperative to vote for the Biden/Harris Democratic ticket as well as Democratic Congressional candidates (House and Senate) if we want to save Social Security and Medicare. As FDR once said, “...this will give the contributors a legal, moral, and political right to collect their [Social Security] pensions.”

If you think that a Republican plan to do away with Social Security and Medicare is too unthinkable even for them, consider that they have been trying to do just that from the beginning. While campaigning of re-election a year after the Social Security Act of 1935 was enacted, FDR said,

Let me warn you and let me warn the Nation against the smooth evasion which says, “Of course we believe all these things; we believe in Social Security; we believe in work for the unemployed; we believe in saving homes. Cross our hearts and hope to die, we believe in all these things; but we do not like the way the present Administration is doing them. Just turn them over to us. We will do all of them—we will do more of them, we will do them better; and, most important of all, the doing of them will not cost anybody anything.

Gee, that sounds a lot like their plan to improve and replace the ACA.

9/11 Revisited: The Phoenix or the Dark Gods

By Bob Passi

Nearly two decades ago on September 11, 2001, an event occurred which changed the direction of this nation and perhaps the direction of the world. Whatever the cause and the intricacies of that event, the result was the death of nearly 3,000 people and the destruction of some iconic national symbols. Everyone remembers that day and those events. With time we have begun to see our responses to that event and the consequences and collateral damage of that response as inevitable and predictable, and perhaps even totally appropriate, as though there had been no other option than to strike back with war and violence.

There were, of course, other options. One result of that event was that the hearts of the world reached out to us almost immediately. They recognized the pain and sadness that accompanied that event, but they did not conclude that war was necessary. They knew that there was another side to America: it was the side that valued human rights and diplomacy. It was the side that recognized that in our powerful position we were capable of rising above those destructive impulses to find a more humane way through that tragedy.

As always, the choices of the moment set a direction and a tone and have consequences and ripples which continue, often becoming a path and a way to deal with future problems.

As in Robert Frost's poem, the choice of the road "less travelled by" can make all the difference.

Leadership is crucial. It takes real courage to rein in a desire to rush to judgement, often making assumptions without taking all the facts into consideration and to strike back: a combination of defensiveness and striking out at perceived threats. Measured responses are often harder but in the long run end up being better at resolving the issues.

However, the Dark Gods are always lurking under the surface, waiting for a moment to emerge, and, once released from the Pandora's Box of emotion, are very difficult to control as they take on a life of their own. The blood and violence provide a visceral satisfaction which speaks to our basest instincts of destroying perceived threats first and only then dealing with the consequences. It is a slippery slope. Blood begets blood, and violence

begets more violence. It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, feeding on itself. It is easy to find opportunities for financial profits in those excesses. Endless national blood and treasure is spent in pursuit of "victory," whatever that might mean.

Both sides begin to believe the adage, "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," leaving humankind eyeless and toothless, as in Matthew Arnold's poem "Dover Beach" about blind and endless war:

And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

Another option is to rise above, to accept the reality of the destruction, and to use it as an impetus for creative rebirth to reform, to be better and stronger, accepting the change and using it as an opportunity to rebuild a better world out of those ashes, symbolized by the Phoenix. The Phoenix symbolizes the energy, strength, resilience, and the potential of transformation as it rises from its own ashes to reach greater heights. It can be recognized as refining and strengthening the core, the inner heart of a people, to rebuild and come back as not only stronger but wiser and better suited to deal with the realities of an ever-changing world. It is about building and not destroying. Mutual destruction is not a reasonable option while domination and occupation are hardly sustainable since they simply suppress a foe who only waits for another opportunity to be redeemed.

The only sustainable solutions are solutions which are mutually acceptable, which form a basis for cooperation, growth, and harmony. They can only be found with great internal strength.

Tragedy is disorienting. Taking a moment to understand the situation and consider other viable options takes courage and strength of character. However, reacting blindly with violence and war—and in the process releasing the Dark Gods of blood and vengeance—we begin to lock in a path toward a future based on war and violence, blood and vengeance: a future which will lead to unintended consequences and too much collateral damage. Taking that moment may allow time to recognize the power of the Phoenix, rising above that tragedy to allow much more positive and productive options and to find more reasonable and humane solutions to great tragedy.

Symbolically, the ashes still remain, and the Phoenix is forever hiding within the ready to rise whenever called upon.



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ITASCA DFL



**Every Wednesday & Friday
September & October**

Time: 3:45 – 5:15 pm (or later)

**Place: Central School Grounds
Grand Rapids, Minnesota**

“It is what we make it”

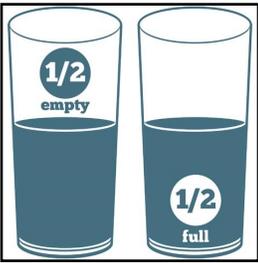
- Making friends • Sharing opinions**
- Voting assistance • Finding resources**
- Meeting candidates •**



The Glass Is Half...?

By Valerie Conner

This is a time for optimism. I don't mean a time to



be optimistic but rather **we need optimism!** Otherwise, we'll be tempted to slink off to a corner to assume the fetal position and be overwhelmed with despair. It's hard to be optimistic, but with faith in our "better angels" and battered traditions, we can try.

On the one hand, we face major trials: increasingly obvious and unaddressed climate change, an ongoing and mounting pandemic, economic vulnerability, regression of human, civil, and labor rights, increasing frustration and violence. On the other hand, all is not lost—yet.

As with any problem in need of a solution, we need to analyze where we've been, where we are, and where we can be. Some problems can be stopped, short-circuited; some can be repaired, although with scars; some can be reversed; some can't.

Climate change cannot be reversed, but it can be slowed and maybe managed. It'll take hard, innovative work—soon. The pandemic can be controlled, again with hard, cooperative, innovative work. Laws securing rights and protecting the environment that have been repealed can be reenacted. The new laws will be different and maybe even better, but the supporting case law will be gone. With a progressive view of the economy and the shoring up of people unintentionally affected by the pandemic by continuing and increasing the unemployment and supplemental payments, the economy can be put on a healing path,

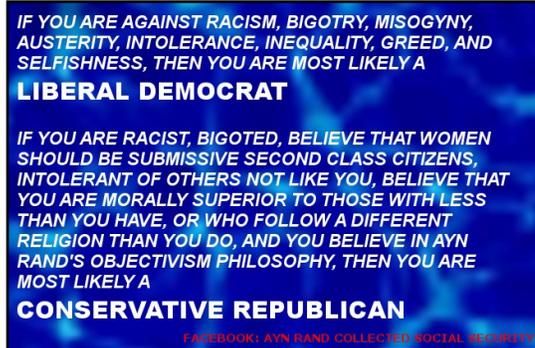
although the direction may veer for better or worse. As tensions ease, the frustration-borne violence will abate.

As with most things, timing is everything. RBG's untimely death is a case in point. The sooner we get started tackling these problems, the better the outcome.

Theoretically, conservatism is all about retaining the good of the past. Today's Republican Party is not your father's conservative party. Rather it is all about destroying the progressive strides we've made in the last 85 years. We must stop their destruction and reverse their damage to the extent we can. The only way we can do that is to vote Democratic, elect progressives and liberals, and promote intelligent policies.

We progressives have been cast in the role of doctors. Some of our patients may not survive, but we must treat them nonetheless. Those who do survive may have fewer body parts, but they will live and even thrive. Progress is all about preserving the good and moving forward to improve our lot with vision, activism, and courage.

How full or empty that glass is up to us. With effort, we can begin filling that glass.



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CALENDAR OF EVENTS: GET INVOLVED AND GET IT DONE!

<u>Event</u>	<u>Date /Time</u>	<u>Location</u>
DFL Headquarters Open (326-6296)	Tues, Wed, Thurs 2:00-5:00	DFL Headquarters
Itasca Progressive Caucus (259-4490)	Suspended	DFL Headquarters
DFL Central Committee Meets	4th Monday	DFL Headquarters
DFL Social Club & Lunch	Suspended	DFL Headquarters
DFL Pot Luck (Open to the Public)	Suspended	DFL Headquarters
Working Families Alliance	Suspended	Dutchroom
Earth Circle	Suspended	GR Public Library
Circles of Support	Suspended	811 NE 4th St. GR
Haven: A Place for All	Suspended	Kiesler Center
Deadline for <i>Common Sense II</i>	October 13, 2020	conray@arvig.net