

Most of the **environmental problems** we face are political – a result of energy policy and climate change denial rigged to favor special interests. “*Congress submits to the pressure of timber, oil, chemical, agribusiness and other big-money interests by trying to weaken environmental safeguards,*” says former Sierra Club President Chuck McGrady. *“The main reason many politicians side with the polluters is their never-ending need for campaign cash.”*

\*\* The US is 5% of the world’s population, yet consumes 25% of the world’s fossil fuels.

\*\* More than 1,000 toxic sites remain dangerous due to lack of Congressional funding.

\*\* The United States remains oil-dependent, neglecting investment in research and development of renewable energy alternatives.

\*\* The oil and gas industry, including the Koch brothers, have given millions to candidates and parties to continue America’s dependence on fossil fuels.

\*\* The energy sector of the economy gives billions to campaigns to try to eliminate environmental regulations, dwarfing the contributions from environmentalists.

\*\* The EPA (Environmental Protection Agency), founded in the 70s after widespread protests by a strong environmental movement, is being severely weakened by Trump.

\*\* Hydraulic-fracking by energy companies threatens our water supply.

\*\* Climate change deniers in Congress and the Trump Administration block U.S. action to reduce climate change and refuse to sign on to international agreements.

\*\*Coal baron Robert Murray, a big Trump donor, gave the President a wish list of environmental rollbacks – almost all of which Trumpism has already achieved! Trump has promised to “bring back coal!”



The rising cost of **higher education** and students’ crushing debt burden are political – the result of decisions made by our elected officials. A college education has never been more crucial for future success. And the health of our economy and our society depend on educating young people. But student loans are big business and lenders continue to donate big money to politicians’ campaigns to block change. Students, on the other hand, aren’t big campaign contributors, so the crisis in higher education is ignored.

\*\* Support for higher education by both state and federal legislators has declined precipitously over recent decades. Funding for public colleges and universities has dropped 40% since the 1980s.

\*\* Colleges and universities have no choice but to raise tuition, increase class size, decrease the number of courses and majors offered, and hire part-time low paid faculty.

\*\* Tuition at public universities has risen 28% since 2008. It is up 107% since the early 1990s. Students and their families are the losers in all of this.

\*\* 70% of students take loans to cover their educational costs. Many also have to work part or full time in addition, with less time to spend on studying and their education.

\*\* The 44 million borrowers of student loans today have a total debt of $1.48 trillion. College graduates in 2016 carry an average debt of $37,176 each.

\*\* Campaign contributions to politicians from the student loan industry have blocked efforts to make student loans more affordable.

\*\* The stagnation in wages for American workers over the last 40 years has added to the difficulty of paying the high cost of a college education, while corporations have made unprecedented profits.

\*\* While many young people are barely getting by, the top executives at banks and major student loan companies are reaping the rewards.



**Women’s inequality and gender discrimination** are unfortunately still part of American society. Women are disproportionately poor, often the victims of sexual violence and sexual harassment, and, even as full-time workers, they are primarily responsible for raising children, and most chores at home. Women are significantly underrepresented in politics, and the laws that exist to counter sexism often remain unimplemented. Politics is still seen as a male domain and issues of special interest to women are often ignored.

\*\* There are 106 women in Congress. 19% of the House of Representatives and 22% of Senators are women. 7% of the women in Congress are women of color.

\*\* Women comprise 23% of state-wide elected officials, and 24% of state legislators. Women of color are 9% of women in state-wide office and 24% of women legislators.

\*\* The majority of elected women are Democrats: ¾ of women in Congress are Democrats and 61% of the women in state legislatures are Democrats.

\*\* In national polls, women are more supportive of social programs like health, education, and welfare, and more opposed to military spending than are men.

\*\* Most women candidates are significantly underfunded compared to men.

\*\* Issues like domestic violence, women’s healthcare, and the poverty of female-headed poor families are neglected by most politicians today.

\*\* Women earn less than men, and contribute significantly less to political campaigns.

\*\* Donald Trump has been accused of sexual harassment by 19 women, and has made disparaging comments about women. There are three women on his 16 person cabinet.



**Economic inequality** is growing rapidly in the United States, and is now greater than any other developed democracy. The rich have been getting richer, especially the wealthiest 1%, while the poor and middle class have been losing out.

\*\* More than half the members of Congress are millionaire or billionaires.

\*\* The recently passed tax plan will increase inequality. It is a give-away to the rich, lowering the corporate tax rate from 35 % to 20%, and enabling the wealthy to pass on significantly more money to their children.

\*\*  In top 1% take home more than 20% of income. Corporate profits have soared, while wages for middle income and poor people have stagnated for the last 4o years.

\*\* Millennials today have a less than 50% chance of earning more than their parents. In the 1970s they had a 90% chance of doing so.

\*\* Because poor and middle income people contribute so little to political campaigns, politicians ignore their needs and concerns. *“I find that elected officials are utterly unresponsive to the policy preferences of low income citizens. The opinions of millions of ordinary citizens have NO discernible impact on the behavior of their elected representatives.”* (Princeton Professor Larry Bartels, Unequal Democracy)

\*\* Many major corporate sectors, like energy, oil, and gas receive huge government subsidies, paid for by taxpaying citizens. Corporate welfare is estimated to cost tax payers $100 billion each year.

\*\* The business sector of the economy typically contributes over 70% of all donations. The securities and investment industry is consistently the biggest funder. Since 1990 it has contributed over $4 billion.



**Racism** is present in the United States today.People of color are disproportionately poor and lack the political power that donations to campaigns gives to wealthy contributors. “We’re not seeing ourselves represented in legislatures. So a political career isn’t seen as a viable option,” said Sayu Bhojwani, of The New American Leaders project. “And if we’re not at the table, our interests aren’t going to get entertained.”

\*\* People of color make up 31% of the population, but only 14% of Congress.

\*\* 11% of elected members of state legislatures are people of color. African Americans are 13% of the population; 9% of state legislatures; Latinos are 17% of the population, 5% of legislatures; Asian-Americans are 5% of the population, 1% of legislatures.

\*\* Candidates of color have a more difficult time raising money and therefore are typically underfunded.

\*\* Civil rights enforcement has lagged. In a 5-4 vote five years ago, the Supreme Court struck down the “heart” of the Civil Rights Act of 1965, freeing nine states, mostly in the South, to change their election laws without advance federal approval.

\*\* Many states have since have passed voter suppression laws aimed at restricting access to the vote by poor people, especially people of color. These include requiring special identification, reducing the opportunity of early voting, and the “racial” gerrymandering of election districts.

\*\* Money and wealth in the United States is increasingly concentrated in the hands of a small group of primarily white males. Less than 1% of the American people donate the majority of the money going to campaigns. The greatest amounts of campaign cash come from neighborhoods where wealthy white populations dominate.

\*\* Mass incarceration affects primarily people of color. Private prisons earn billions in profits each year. The US has a higher percentage of its people in prison than any other country. 38% of prison inmates are African-American (13% of total US population); 33% are Latino (17% of total US population); 58% are white (63% of total US population).