

The Theories of the American Government

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### Abstract

The way the United States, and even the world functions today, relies heavily on the inner workings of the government. Yet, in this country, the government tends to be corrupt and not always have the nation's best interests in mind. Throughout history, the United States has considered itself the role model, and thus protector of democracy - the rule by the people. However, research has proven that democracy is not the only policy within the United States. The country most likely runs on one, or a combination of a few, of four theories: traditional democratic theory, pluralism, hyperpluralism and the elite class theory. Here, the current aspects of democracy, including its hypocrisies are examined through the government's attitudes towards whistleblowers, clean energy and climate change. Each topic was extensively researched from several sides of the argument in order to show which theory the United States actually is governed by, as well as highlight which theory may be best for the country as a whole.

## The Theories of the American Government

### **Introduction**

The United States was formed on the basis of democracy. The Founding Fathers created a republic in order to give all citizens a voice in the decisions of the country. The federal government, created in 1789 by the U.S. Constitution made history with the idea that the government not only governed, but also listened to the people. In order to do this, the members of the federal government had to agree to a central authority, in the form of the President, and subject themselves to its law.

The goal of the republic was to prevent a monarchy and absolute power. In order to achieve this, the Framers of the Constitution separated the duties of ruling the nation into three branches: the legislative, the executive and the judicial. The legislative branch is tasked with creating laws and the executive is tasked with enforcing those laws. The judicial branch must establish if those laws are just and constitutional, as well as determine when and how the laws have been broken. Through this policy, the Framers hoped that the government of the United States would run smoothly and that the citizens would have a proper say in how they were governed (Kehen, 1996). Unfortunately, the United States has not always been able to meet the expectations of the Founding Fathers. In fact, lately it would seem that in the United States, the people no longer have much of a say. The country is not truly ruled by the people anymore. This has become more and more apparent through investigations into how the government treats whistleblowers, the government's position of clean energy, and lastly its actions, or lack thereof, in controlling climate change. In order to establish who the ruling powers of the United States are, the

theories of traditional democratic, pluralism, hyperpluralism and elite have been developed and analyzed in terms of the United States government.

Traditional democratic theory relies on the influence of the citizens. The people living under the ruling nation are supposedly given influence over the policy makers. Typically, this occurs through voting and elections of representative officials. These votes then get passed up to the legislation and are incorporated into law. The downside of this traditional theory is that the majority of people believe it to be fully true, without doing any further investigations. Under this theory people are expected to have a transparent view into the workings of the government, yet this is actually not the case. But because democracy is so widely accepted, very few citizens understand that this is not the policy in which the United States is being governed.

In reality, Pluralism is more closely related to the type of democracy that many people believe in and support. In this ideology, there is no dominant power source. The power that comes with ruling the nation is even divided up among many different and diverse groups. These groups then vie for power and compete with one another for control over public policies. Pluralists believe heavily in the free-market economy, which in fact, this theory somewhat mirrors. Like the competition that a free-market capitalist relies on in order to keep prices up and business going, Pluralists rely on competition in order to decide the ruling groups. Finally, Pluralists agree that businesses and corporations are to divided within groups to gain any type of political power (Domhoff, 2005).

Hyperpluralism is the opposite of Pluralism. Whereas Pluralism supports the idea of many groups and believes that these groups work together and compete in order to run

the country, hyper pluralists believe groups are what are causing the nation's problems. In the minds of hyper pluralists, division threatens the effectiveness of the government. This is because the division prevents the ability to govern collectively as a whole. The often-conflicting perspectives of each group can create gridlock within the government and prevents any decisions from being made. Rather than implementing this system to a government as a whole, it is usually applied during discussions of controversial topics such as immigration (White, n.d.).

The final theory that may be able to describe the American government is that of the elite theory. The elite theory states that true power of the nation rests in the hands of the wealthy and the top one percent. Here, the political, social and economic elite rules the nation. However, elitists put much less emphasis on class differences, which causes them to underestimate the gap between the top and bottom tiers of the social ladder. Most of the strength of the elitists comes from the owners of large corporations. Due to the owner's large wealth, they can afford to support and campaign for whichever candidate they please. This allows the elitists to build the government in their favor, thus perpetuating the elite-run nation (Domhoff, 2005). It would appear that the elite are more in control of the governing of the United States than the government is.

The United States of America was built on the premise of democracy. This country supposedly pioneered the notion that all citizens should have a voice in the government. Yet, over the years, the structure of the American government has changed; no longer do the people have a voice. Today, power is given to those who hold the majority of the country's wealth. The government and the wealthy try to cover this and other discrepancies up by silencing whistleblowers. The government dissuades actions to

produce clean energy because it is not profitable, and looming environmental catastrophe is accepted because large corporations would lose business if the rainforests were protected. The United States may have been built to be a democracy, but today, it is a nation ruled by the elite class.

### **The War on Whistleblowers**

When the government violates a law or is guilty of some form of gross mismanagement, the people have the right to know. That is where whistleblowers come in. A ‘whistleblower’ is an employee of the government or other large establishment who reveals their knowledge of wrongdoings to the public (Dugger, n.d.). Now the actions of whistleblowers are often not approved of. The organization, be it the government or a national corporation, rarely appreciates its secrets getting printed in the media. Because of this, there are things put in place to protect those who chose to blow the whistle. However, in recent years, this nation’s leaders have undermined those rights and protections. Despite constitutional rights to freedom of speech and press, the government has sought to prosecute whistleblowers. Regardless of what the government believes, whistleblowers are a public necessity – not a public nuisance – and should be given the rights that the Constitution states they have.

There is a wide range of what whistleblowers are willing to expose. In 1971, Daniel Ellsberg leaked the now infamous Pentagon Papers, revealing government abuses during the Vietnam War, to multiple newspapers. Ellsberg was eventually arrested and tried for his ‘crimes’, but the charges were dropped in a declared mistrial (Daniel Ellsberg, 2015). More recently, a young NSA employee named Edward Snowden revealed that the agency was spying on ordinary people. Snowden currently resides in

Russia after fleeing for the United States because he feared arrest and government retaliation. And these are not the only examples. There is Bradley Manning (now Chelsea Manning) who exposed American war crimes overseas and Julian Assange, founder of Wiki Leaks (Alonso, 2013). These men, and the countless others not mentioned here, believed that the public had the right to know what was being kept secret, and they all faced government persecution on account of their actions. But the government should be protecting them, not hunting them down. Whistleblowers and the press who help them deserve their rights to the freedom of speech, yet those rights have often not been provided.

In 1989, Congress created the Whistleblower Protection Act (WPA), which protects any disclosure of organized wrongdoings including waste, fraud and abuse. What this means is whistleblowers cannot be punished for revealing their information. Then in 2012, President Obama signed the Whistleblower Protection Enhancement Act, which in theory furthers the rights and protections of those who chose to blow the whistle. The act recognizes the necessity of whistleblowers to the healthy functionality of the United States government (Zuckerman, 2012). And when it comes to the press that publishes the leaked information, there are rights for them too. They, like the whistleblowers, have the constitutional right to free speech and freedom of the press. Back in the 1970s, during the trial of Daniel Ellsberg, the Supreme Court ruled that newspapers had the right to publish the Pentagon Papers - after the government had attempted to prevent them with an injunction (Daniel Ellsberg, 2015). So now there are protection in place for whistleblowers and their accomplices. The real question, however, is does the government actually follow these laws?

With the signing of the Whistleblower Protection Enhancement Act (WPEA) and the more recent National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), it would appear that the Obama administration is doing everything that it can to aid and protect whistleblowers. In fact, Obama is the first president to expand whistleblower rights to those national security and intelligence agency employees (Davidson, 2012). However, upon closer investigation, these appearances are just that: an appearance. In reality, the NDAA undermines the rights provided by the WPA and WPEA. This is because, according to President Obama, the NDAA's protections, "could be interpreted in a manner that would interfere with [his] authority to manage and direct executive branch officials," Obama will simply ignore the protections of the NDAA if it gets in the way of his power. Many say that by signing the NDAA, Obama is assuring everybody of the hostility he and his administration have towards all types of whistleblowers (Liebelson, 2013).

Along with these new laws, Obama has been ruthlessly prosecuting whistleblowers under the 1917 Espionage Act. This act was meant for spies of foreign nations during World War I; however, the Obama administration has been twisting it to fit with American whistleblowers. In the past eight years, seven people have been charged under the Espionage Act. Since its implementation just under a century ago, only three people had been tried with this act - one of those people being Daniel Ellsberg. The most recent person charged under the Espionage Act was John Kiriakou, former officer for the CIA. He was arrested after revealing CIA water boarding torture tactics. Ironically, he was the first person arrested in connection to the torture - but only because he exposed what was going on (Van Buren, 2012). In fact, Kiriakou even went on to write an article comparing Obama's crackdown on whistleblowers to that of Cold War



era McCarthyism. One of the biggest issues with the evident misuse of the Espionage act is that it is not applied equally. Often it is used in ways to further the president's political goals. He persecutes those whose whistleblowing go against his views or make him look bad, usually those who are in the national security and intelligence sectors. Kiriakou states that he was charged under the Espionage Acts as a form of punishment. The purpose of the act in his opinion is to destroy the life, career and future of the whistleblower (Kiriakou, 2013).

The 2012 case of CIA director David Petraeus's leaking of classified military information highlights the claim that the Obama administration is only prosecuting whistleblowers who go against their political actions. Petraeus pled guilty to and was charged with a single misdemeanor, despite having given his mistress top-level information on identities, strategies and more. This leak could very well lead to dangerous breeches in national security, yet Petraeus is only serving two years of probation. On the other hand, Chelsea Manning is serving 35 years in jail for releasing videos of military wrongdoings during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. So it appears that the law does not uphold for those in powerful positions. Daniel Ellsberg, the original whistleblower, stated that if Petraeus is let off on a misdemeanor, then Snowden should be too. Yet Edward Snowden is hiding away, facing three felony charges under the Espionage Act (Prupis, 2015).

Even though the government seems to be doing everything in its power to prevent people from leaking secret information, whistleblowers keep going. And that is a very good thing because whistleblowers are necessary for the function of the nation. They expose transgressions of powerful people and organizations, that were previously

unknown about or ignored. Some whistleblowers, as is in the case of Donna Busche, are trying to protect their health and the health of those around them. Bushe, a manager of Environment and Nuclear Safety at the Hanford site of the United States Department of Energy, raised alarms over the dangerous conditions of working at the plant. However, shortly after exposing the ignored safety regulations by the companies' clean-up crew, Bushe was fired. In fact, she was the third employee fired due to 'unprofessional conduct' after voicing her concerns (Lazare, 2014). In this case, a whistleblower tried to do right, but was repressed by those in positions of authority. Whistleblowers goal is to make a positive change. They want to let the people know when something is not right.

Whistleblowers are vital to the system of checks and balances. They must be used to keep the government and other powerful institutions moral and honest. The public has a right to know about corruption within the inner workings of the country. And though the government may not like to admit it, whistleblowers often do inspire some change.

Thanks to Snowden, governments around the world are beginning to consider putting limitations on mass surveillance of the public (Saleem, 2014). Whistleblowers bring to light necessary changes that the American public may not have even known about.

Coming forward as a whistleblower is an extraordinary risk. Becoming a whistleblower can mean losing one's job, freedom and even country. However, there should not be a risk. The government should be protecting whistleblowers and their basic rights as human beings. The goal of a whistleblower is not to threaten the security of this nation but to expose misconduct in areas of waste, fraud and abuse within government and powerful corporations. In reality, a whistleblower is helpful to the government as they can point out error and bring attention to things that need to be improved or

changed. However, the government usually does not see it that way. Instead of supporting the whistleblowers, the current Obama administration has been aggressively trying to stop them. Yet, the only reason why the government should be silencing whistleblowers is if there is hard and true evidence that the leaked information is dangerous to national security. If so, the government should be able to release a detailed report explaining the dangers of this information. But, in the recent whistleblower cases tried under the Espionage Acts, there has been no mention of dangers to national security.

Whistleblowers need to be provided protective services, especially when their information is of greater public concern. Rather than fearing retaliation from the government, a whistleblower deserves support. They, like any other person, have the right to an attorney and the right to a fair trial. But trying whistleblowers is problematic because it infringes on their right to exercise the freedom of speech. Therefore, there is no legal reason for whistleblowers to be persecuted by the government (US: Statement..., 2013).

Even though the government has been vehemently hunting down most whistleblowers, there are some that they tolerate, if not support. These tend to be journalists who only leak information from a certain political party, with the goal to make that party look good. The journalists benefit from the leaks that are approved by the party, usually through payoffs and promotions. Due to this agreement between some journalists and government parties, the journalists are angered by the actions of conventional whistleblowers. These journalists believe that government secrets are best kept secret - unless they are paid to release them (Hanrahan, 2015). This small amount of government support for a certain type of whistleblower points out the hypocrisy in that

support. The government, as well as big businesses, only approve of leaked information that benefits them - not the nation as a whole. Yet, there is still information out there, sometimes caused by the government, that the people have a right to know about, whether the government approves of it or not.

Now there are some that would disagree with the idea that whistleblowers should be provided the same rights as anyone else. These people believe that whistleblowers cause more harm than good when they release previously kept secret information. The belief is that leaking classified government information will make the United States vulnerable to another terrorist attack. A *National Interest* article published shortly after the Snowden NSA release spoke out about the consequences of Snowden's actions on the country and government. The article suggests that the damage done by the leak is far more extensive than the benefits received by the public. In fact, the leakage has caused "public expressions of disapproval by foreign governments and consumption of the valuable time and attention," (Pillar, 2013). This seems like a small price to pay for discovering that the government is illegally spying on every citizen in the United States.

Despite government opposition, whistleblowers continue to spread their knowledge. And they have the right to do so, just like the public have the right to know. It all comes down to the constitutional right to freedom of speech. Currently, the Obama administration is doing everything in its power to silence the voices of whistleblowers and those who want to expose the truth. Yet this is infringing on basic rights set forth by the Founders of the United States. The prosecution of whistleblowers highlights the government's ideology that they are not required to follow the laws that they put into place. But that is the main purpose of a whistleblower: to remind the government that

they to are obligated to follow the law. Yes, it is true that the actions of a whistleblower can have some downsides - for both the whistleblower and the country. The whistleblower often loses their job and faces serious jail time. The exposed information can also lead to mistrust within a company causing failure of said company. But the mistrust can spread to the government as well (Donohue, n.d.). What would happen if the public stopped trusting the government altogether? However, that raises the question, why was the government participating in untrustworthy things in the first place?

Therefore, whistleblowers are necessary to ensure honesty in the government. Not only that, but they help fix problems that people may not have even known existed.

Whistleblowers should be protected, not prosecuted, by the government; if not only for their basic constitutional rights and the rights of the people, but in order to uphold the first amendment right to the freedom of speech.

### **Clean Energy vs. Oil in Their Impact on the Economy and the Environment**

The modern world runs on oil. It is in our cars, factories and homes. Without oil, there would be no transportation, no electricity or no manufacturing. Humanity relies on oil, consuming almost 400,000 barrels of the fuel per day (Klare, 2014). Not only does oil run the world, it greatly controls the economy. When oil prices go up, the cost of almost everything else goes up, as it gets more expensive to produce and transport goods.

However, many fear that lower oil and gas prices will harm the economy. But oil and the use of fossil fuels have a different price. That is, their effect on the environment. Drilling for oil, fracking, oil spills and more all release harmful and dangerous pollutants into the air, water and ground. The solution to this is the use of clean energy over fossil fuels.

Some continue to worry that removing fossil fuels from the economic system would

cause a breakdown in the whole cycle (Knappenberger, 2014). Yet, since clean energy would allow for a healthier and more sustainable world, its use over nonrenewable polluting fossil fuels is worth the economic risk.

In recent months, the prices of oil and gasoline have dropped drastically, while the economy has continued to survive. This gives doubt to the idea that the economy will crash with lower oil prices. In actuality, if we as the United States switched to clean and renewable energy, there would be great economic benefits. For example, we could become self-sustaining rather than relying on foreign oil. In his state of the union address president Obama referred to the process of fracking, or extracting crude oil directly out of the ground, as a 'bridge' fuel to clean energy. This means that by continuing to frack, we could eventually come to rely on clean energy and renewable fuel resources. How are the two related? Well, the more fracking that is done, the more oil will be in the country's reserves. With more oil available, the price of oil will go down and we will not rely on the oil of other countries. However, since oil is nonrenewable, the search for clean energy must continue (Plumer, 2014).

The search must continue also because of the devastating effects fracking and oil extraction have on the environment. It has direct effects on the air, soil and water and can even impact human health. Hydraulic fracturing (another name for fracking) is the process of extracting oil from underneath a body of water. Often in this process, known toxins and chemicals are injected into water or the ground nearby. Due to rainwater runoff and other factors, these chemicals can end up in drinking water. These chemicals, many of which are known to cause cancer, include ammonia, formaldehyde, sulfuric acid and methanol (Hydraulic Fracturing 101, n.d.).

Though it may seem that fracturing and oil production must be stopped as soon as possible, that would not be a benefit to the economy. Fracking must continue until a solid and productive renewable clean energy source is found. In the meantime, some people believe that fracking can be done in an environmentally friendly way. These people also believe that it is not necessary to ever stop fracking. The idea behind these beliefs is that as the country enjoys more economic growth from the successes of fracking and oil production, there will be more means available to protect the environment. However, this may only happen with specific state and local regulations on private property rights and environmental conservation (Loris, 2014). What these people are saying is that we can continue to frack, as long as we also pay attention to the environment. Yet, would it not be simpler to find renewable clean energy sources that require little regulation and protects the environment? It may, but first the impacts, both positive and negative of the product of fracking must be considered.

Oil, the product of fracking, is a nonrenewable fossil fuel. It is nonrenewable because this energy source was formed millions of years ago by plant and animal fossils exposed to the extreme heat and pressure of the Earth's crust. Today, oil has a strong control of the global economy. This is because it is the world's main source of energy. The prices of selling oil and gas have a direct influence on things such as inflation and consumer spending. Not only that but the oil industry employs millions of people and is creating more jobs each year. Within one year, the industry can also contribute around \$380 million to the American economy (How Does Oil Impact the Economy?, n.d.) The benefits of the oil industry on the economy are huge. But the benefits usually only occur when oil and gas prices remain high. The recent decrease in the price of oil has many

concerned. Due to its control over the economy, any change in the cost of gas and fuel can cause a lot of problems.

The current prices are having great ramifications worldwide. Many oil-producing countries such as Venezuela and Russia are suffering economic hardships, as they are unable to make as much profit from one of their main sources of money. Some economists predict that Russia's GDP will fall more than 4.5% if the gas prices continue to stay low or fall even lower. In Venezuela, there is fear that the economy will have to default and other countries will run into a serious deficit (Plumer, 2014). These countries rely heavily on normal to high gas prices to keep their economies afloat. However, the low prices do have benefits in other areas and aspects of life. Lower prices are leading to more consumers spending within the stock market, which helps stimulate the economy. What is even more is that they boost corporate earnings and also take certain pressures off the Federal Reserve. As wages increase, even in the slightest amount, consumers have more money that they can put into the economy. However, the wage increase is so small that spending has not increased as much as it needs too and fears of deflation are spreading (Browning, 2014). In conclusion, the low oil and gasoline prices have the potential to improve the economy in specific places, mainly the consumers of oil, such as the United States. But in reality, the low prices are causing significant harm to everyone worldwide.

The nature of oil itself, however, can have a serious impact on the economy. This comes from the extraction, production and use of oil. These all hurt the environment and human health, which in turn, can harm the economy. Pollution caused by oil and fossil fuels affect water, soil and air. The most significant negative externalities of oil



production are the emissions of greenhouse gases, which lead to global warming and climate change. These externalities include things like groundwater contamination, health effects and even household explosions (Dolan, 2012). Economist Joseph Stiglitz believes that climate change and pollution, mainly that caused by oil, is the most daunting problem facing the U.S. economy today. And there is proof to his statement. It is projected that global warming will cost the government around \$4 billion in the next five to six years. The global economy is already losing \$1.2 trillion in lost prosperity due to the environmental problems. In addition to this, extreme weather changes and disasters that occur as a result of pollution and climate change have cost the United States 1.06 trillion dollars in the past thirty years (Kleinman, 2013). The great costs of environmental pollution can seriously harm the economy, especially if the pollution continues over the next few decades.

Then there is the well-known oil spills. These have a huge impact on both the environment and the economy. An oil spill occurs when cracks form in drills for hydraulic fracking or because of other factors. When this happens in a big way, huge amounts of oil are pumped into the water. As oil spills out, fish are killed as well as birds and other marine animals. The spill interrupts the delicate balance of life and the ecosystem of the marine animals. But the spill also hurts the economy. First off, the spill causes huge losses in the amount of oil obtained. This leads to the need to ship oil from other countries, increasing the cost of the oil per barrel. And then there is the costly process of cleaning up the oil and dealing with the environmental damages (Oil Spills, n.d.). Oil and its impact on the environment, from air pollution to devastating oil spills, also impact the economy, making clean energy a better choice as the world's main source of fuel.

Tar sands are the crudest form of oil. It is composed of a mixture of clay, sand, water and heavy black viscous oil called bitumen. Tar sands are the dirtiest type of oil in the world and produce much more pollution than regular oil. In fact, about three times more carbon dioxide is emitted during the extraction and refining of tar sands oil than regular oil. Tar sands are not commonly extracted in the United States, but it runs rampant in Canada. There is much controversy over the company TransCanada's hopes to run a tarsands transporting pipeline through the central United States. The pipeline, referred to as Keystone XL, would create a huge amount of environmental problems throughout the areas around the pipe, as it would be carrying the most volatile of fuel sources. There would be pollution from the extraction processes in which toxic sludge would sink to the bottom of ponds and rivers in the United States and in Canada. In order to dig for tarsands, many forests have to be destroyed, increasing the global effects of climate change. When and if the pipeline cracks and causes a spill, the toxic oil will be spilled into the surrounding soil and water. For example, in 2010 millions of gallons of Enbridge tarsands oil were spilled into the Kalamazoo River in Michigan. This impacted the economy as billions of dollars has been spent since then to clean up the river, and the process is still not done. But money is not the only thing that the spills could cost. When drinking water is contaminated, people consume the hundreds of dangerous and deadly chemicals used in the extraction, production and in the oil itself. Towns that are near or downstream from a tar sands pipeline or drill have seen an increase in certain health complications. Complications include diseases such as lupus, renal failure and hypothyroidism. In other towns, more than eight percent of the population dies from cancer (Keystone XL Pipeline, n.d.). Tar sands and the processes involving tar sands

cause many problems. It is dangerous to the environment and the economy and can be fatal to the health of humans. But the use of tar sands would no longer be needed if the world converted to clean energy.

All this talk about clean energy, but what exactly is it? Clean energy is fuel produced by renewable sources that lead to little or no harmful pollutants and emissions. And there are many different types of clean energy sources. They include wind and solar power, biomass, geothermal and hydroelectric power. Each one is a renewable source and is not harmful to the environment if used correctly. Wind and solar power harness naturally occurring events such as wind and light or heat from the sun, and convert that power into useable energy. Biomass energy is the use of plant and animal waste to generate electricity, though if not handled properly it can harm the environment. Geothermal energy uses heat and steam from the Earth for electricity as well. Finally, hydroelectric power is the use of the movement of flowing water to generate electricity (Danielson, 2013). The environmental benefits of clean energy cannot be ignored when considering the use of these sources over traditional fossil fuels. But clean energy can have both positive and negative impacts on the economy, those of which must be considered as well.

As previously mentioned, oil and fuel control the economy. The drop in prices in the recent months has many people fearful of an economic downturn. Others argue that the low prices are a bad sign for the environment. As prices went up, there was more of an incentive for companies to invest in clean energy. However, as prices go down, that incentive goes away. But by not investing in clean energy now, there will be more harm done when the oil prices rebound to the original high prices (Sutton, 2014). Then there is

the argument that without oil, there will be nothing to help regulate prices throughout the economy. People also worry that by switching to clean energy, too many jobs will be destroyed, which will further hurt the economy. Some types of clean energy are also very expensive to build and run. For example, for hydroelectric energy, rivers must be dammed. The dams are extremely expensive and can negatively impact downriver communities that rely on the wildlife and fish in the rivers. All types of clean energy sources come with their own high prices. But it is nothing compared to the costs of continued use of fossil fuels.

Despite opposition, there is a large amount of evidence that shows clean energy is helpful, and on the rise. According to Dan Utech from Energy.Gov, electricity produced by wind and solar power has doubled in recent years and the costs of clean energy installation continues to go down. In correlation to this, the past two years have seen the lowest carbon emissions in over two decades (Utech, 2014). Wind and solar seem to be the most economically friendly forms of clean energy. The prices of these sources have dropped dramatically compared to the price of conventional fuels such as natural gas. With subsidies, solar power costs about 5.6 cents per kilowatt-hour and wind comes down to about 1.4. For natural gas and coal, the cost per kilowatt-hour is 6.1 and 6.6 cents, respectively (Cardwell, 2014). The costs alone of clean energy are already showing a benefit to the economy over that of fossil fuels - but it is not the only perk of environmentally friendly energy.

Clean energy does not only provide environmental prosperity. It also provides jobs and economic growth, especially if dealt with and implemented properly. A report released by the University of Massachusetts and the Center for American Progress, titled

*Green Growth*, states that an economy centered on clean energy is truly in reach. *Green Growth* predicts that by investing about 200 billion dollars in clean energy annually will help create around 4.2 million jobs, leading to a 2.7 million net increase in overall jobs. But this is just a prediction. In order for it to actually happen, the investment in clean energy, American consumption of oil would have to fall 40% and that of natural gas would have to decrease about 30%. And, yes, \$200 billion is a lot of money. However, when that price tag is compared to the 2008 bank bailouts, it is 20% less of a bill. Even more, it is 40% less than what was invested into the oil and gas industries in the last year (Marcacci, 2014). The amount of new jobs in the economy would be enough to reduce the current unemployment rate to 8.4 percent, one whole percent lower than what it is at today. And this is even after taking the job losses from the conventional fossil fuel industry into account. The amount of jobs and income created by clean energy is sure to equal or even surpass that of the jobs lost in the oil industry.

Before the conversion can happen, the United States needs to undergo a doable economic transformation. There are three main things that must be put in place in order to reduce our reliance on oil as well as our carbon footprint as a country. First, there must be an increase in the efficiency of the country's energy use. In order to do this, there needs to be people hired to research and implement new technologies. This creates jobs, as mentioned earlier. In addition to this, clean energy sources must be made less expensive in order for all people to be able to afford them. As the price goes down and these new resources become more available, citizens will begin pouring more money into the economy. Finally, there needs to be a limit or tax on the amount of pollution that households or companies are allowed to produce. In theory, these ideas will help ease the

economic transition from oil to clean energy (Pollin, Heintz, Garrett-Peltier, 2009). These programs could help lower the United States harmful emissions by 30-40%. That is a big improvement from our current situation, and it may continue to improve. Congress has been working to pass the American Clean Energy and Security Act, which would start promoting clean energy, capping carbon emissions and assisting businesses and communities in the transition of fuel sources. Before the country can experience all the economic growth that clean energy promises, a few things have to change. Once those things are in place, there is great possibility for prosperity.

Besides new jobs, how else will clean energy support economic growth? Clean energy products such as solar panels, wind turbines, etc. do cost a lot to install, but they pay off in the long run. Companies and homes save, combined, around ninety billion dollars a year after switching to clean energy. This is because they no longer have to pay for their energy and electricity, as they are now producing their own. Again, there is more money available to put into the economy. The savings, as well as an increase in jobs, which means additional or higher incomes, will benefit the economy with more capital. Now the government must also step in to assist in the clean energy transformation in order for it to be the most economically pleasing. Much more investing, for both private and public must be done. On the private sector, the government needs to regulate risk and accessibility to aid in green banks, restructuring of clean energy and more. There also needs to be investment in regional clean energy, again regulated by the government to provide local investments and spending to transitional communities (Pollin, Garret-Peltier, Heintz, & Hendricks, 2014). Switching to clean energy will in fact bring about great growth in the economy.

As of now, oil runs the global and national economy. It controls prices, jobs and incomes. Because of this overarching control, many people believe that without oil, the economy would fall to shambles. They fear that the implementation of clean energy could lead to another Great Depression. Yet, clean energy is worth the risk, especially since there is very little evidence that proves that clean energy will do anything but help the economy. Oil, fossil fuels and fracking are quickly destroying the world we live in. They pollute the air and water, sending dangerous and often fatal toxins into peoples homes, food and drinking water. Though it may support the economy, it is not worth keeping a time bomb around, which will eventually destroy the natural environment. Plus, since oil and fossil fuels are nonrenewable, we will eventually run out of our most relied upon fuel source. Clean energy is renewable and nonpolluting. It uses natural occurrences for energy and electricity. Because of its natural ingredients, there is no pollution, thus the environment is protected. Clean energy is also inexpensive in the long run and helps add more money into the economy through jobs, incomes and growth. The continued use of oil now, believing that it is not all that bad for the economy, is only delaying the inevitable: when all oil is used up. A future world that has suddenly lost its main fuel source could look like some type of dystopian movie. But that future can be prevented, and the economy will survive as well. Clean energy is better for the environment, for human health and for the future. The economic and life-long benefits of clean energy can no longer be ignored. It is time to switch to clean energy, so the world, and the economy, can thrive.

**Capitalism vs. The Climate: Neither is Sustainable with the Other**

Lately there has been a controversial topic on the minds of politicians, activists and citizens alike; and that is the topic of climate change, global warming and the environment. Despite opposition, there is scientific evidence that the temperature, worldwide, is increasing. In fact, the ten warmest years on record have occurred in the past fifteen. And temperature increases are not the only sign of a changing climate, as weather is not a complete and accurate representation of the climate. All over the world sea levels are rising, the oceans are acidifying and weather patterns such as precipitation are changing (Global Warming..., n.d.). There are many who say that we are headed for certain disaster if the issues of global warming and climate change are not resolved - and soon. However, it has become apparent that there is a connection between the environment and the economy, especially that of capitalistic United States. Evidence supports the idea that capitalism is a large component of global warming and in order to put a stop to this dangerous phenomenon, capitalism must be obliterated, or at least changed. If we as a population want our world to last, we must accept that our capitalistic economy and mindset does not support the sustainability of the planet.

Capitalism is having a negative impact on nearly every aspect of the environment. Across the planet, forests and animals are dying off. The Amazon Rainforest is shrinking due to human deforestation, meaning the cutting down of trees and forests to make room for agriculture and development. Though the rainforest can still filter more carbon than it takes in, a 'tipping point' is coming. In the last two years, temperatures in Antarctica reached extreme highs of 63 degrees Fahrenheit and Arctic ice is melting. Polar bears, Mountain goats and Sea lions are among the many types of animals who are struggling to



survive has increasing temperatures and human invasion are destroying their habitats and food supplies. And then there is the record-breaking drought in California, leading to mandatory water restrictions statewide. And California is not the only state in trouble. Experts predict that at least 80% of the United States will face water shortage within the next decade (Jamail, 2015). The country is running out of water. Dire consequences are on the rise if the issue of climate change is not taken care of.

Climate change refers to the increase of average world temperatures over the last few decades. The greenhouse gases released and trapped in the atmosphere, including carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide, often causes this. Though humans need these gases in the air to survive, they are what are causing the problems. The Greenhouse Effect, or the increase of greenhouse gases in the environment, is directly related to and caused by human activity, which causes an imbalance of the natural cycle of atmospheric filtration processes. Humans mine coal and drill for oil to use in transportation, electricity and manufacturing. Unfortunately, this use requires the burning of fossil fuels, which effectively produces an unnaturally large amount of carbon that gets pumped into the atmosphere (Shah, 2015). If harmful human activity continues like this, the environment will experience devastating effects. However, the only way to solve the climate crisis may involve changing the entire system that runs this country.

Naomi Klein, an author and social activist, recently released a book that many believe has crossed the political 'river of fire'. In her book *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*, Klein outlines the connection between the capitalistic need to grow, and the continuous destruction of the environment. In an earlier article, Klein identified the reasons why there has been little to no change in environmental and

economic policies. She states that people have avoided any discussion on the ‘obvious roots of the climate crisis: globalization, deregulation and contemporary capitalism’s quest for perpetual growth,’ (Klein, 2011). Ironically enough, these roots are also responsible for the failures of the rest of the economy. Klein's book sets out to show that the only way to save our planet from catastrophic crisis, if we are not there already, is to forge a radically different economic and government system. This new system would have to cooperate within the bounds of the planet and its nonrenewable resources. Creating a new system, however, would involve getting the capitalist and political elites on board, and willing to spend their money (Holthaus, 2014). It will take a lot more than relying on billionaires, though; change will take worldwide cooperation, understanding and transformation.

The climate-capitalism connection was most vividly shown in the Environmental Protection Agency’s 2009 annual inventory of emissions. The 2009 report showed an almost 6% decline in carbon and other harmful gas emissions. This is compared to the 7% average increase in emissions since the 1990’s. What was so significant about 2009 and the years prior to it? The United States, the world’s second most producer of carbon emission falling just behind leading producer China, was experiencing an economic recession in 2008 and 2009. During these years, most of the country switched to using natural gas over coal, as the price for the gas had declined. But the economic slowdown played an important role in the reduction of emissions. The largest change in emissions during those two years came from the industrial and transportation sectors (Broder, 2011). Manufacturing had slowed down, thus less carbon and other gases could be emitted into the atmosphere. However, the very next year, carbon emissions were back up

to 'normal' and have not fallen as low as they were in 2009 since. In the industrial sector, 681.20 metric tons of carbon emissions were produced in 2009, the lowest in at least the last two decades. Then in 2010, once the economy had picked back up - so did the emissions, skyrocketing to 728.21 metric tons that year. Though the emissions have not hit the all-time high of 1992 (824.57 metric tons), the levels are continuing to rise (Greenhouse Gas..., n.d.). Further research shows a capitalism and carbon emissions connection dating back to the 1850's, which is when large scale industrialization began to take off. Emissions increased at a steady but slow rate for a little less than the next century. Then, the emissions spiked and began to grow dramatically with the start of the automobile industry and car culture in America. However, like in 2009, there was a drop in emissions in the 1930's. Coincidentally, this was during the time period of the Great Depression. Since then, emissions have continued to increase as production increases, showing a direct correlation between CO2 emissions and capitalism (Urie, 2014). The connection is clear, when our capitalist economy suffers, the environment gains.

Capitalism itself is not what harms the environment, but the fundamental ideologies of the system. It is based on a property of constantly expanding markets, faster consumer consumption and production on a grander scale. Capitalists are trying to run their infinite system in a finite world. The principles of capitalism will continue, as they have throughout the past, to undermine any attempt at green initiative. The production of energy is the main source of fossil fuels and the climate crisis, but it is also the political and capitalist elites main source of income. So in order to curb the warming of the planet, the world's billionaires would have to give up their billions (Newman, 2006). Now that is unlikely, which explains why there has been little done to help save the climate.

The question then becomes: capitalism or the climate? Which one are we as a society willing to give up, because it is simply impossible to have both. Not only does it harm the environment, but also it creates inequality leading to social tensions. Capitalism, in layman terms, is not sustainable. Some slow progress can be seen as certain financial investors such as Peter Wheeler, Pavan Sukhdev and Jamie Arbib are looking for ways to realign capitalism with the climate. These men are liberals, they do not want to change the whole system, just fix it. There are many others like them who choose to remain silent on any piece of this issue so as not to rock the boat and just go with the flow (Juniper, 2014). They want to keep the same system, yet that just will not work. Capitalism strives to maximize profit and that requires constant growth, usually at the cost of the environment. And, even though scientific evidence proves that the burning of fossil fuels is cataclysmic to the environment, capitalism depends on them for survival. Without fuels, there is nothing to produce or transport goods and no ways for consumers to get to those goods. Plus, fossil fuels are cheap, despite the heavy cost to the world around us (Engler, 2013). So there is evidence and proven facts that show that capitalism could very well mean the total destruction of the environment. Yet, people still fight to keep this capitalistic system in the economy. What's more, there are still those who would disagree that global warming and climate change are even relevant problems.

There are people who choose to believe that global warming is some type of left-wing hoax. The most recent example of global warming dissent came from outspoken Oklahoma senator Jim Inhofe this past winter. Inhofe brought a snowball onto the senate floor in order to prove his claim that there is actually no global warming. After throwing the snowball at fellow congress member, Inhofe proceed to speak of the unseasonably

cold weather around the country including the 67 record low temperatures that occurred the week prior to his snowball incident (Sheppard, 2015). Unfortunately for the Senator, a snowball proves nothing, because despite the admittedly frigid temperatures of the East Coast and Midwest, the rest of the country is not experiencing the same thing. Nine states in the Western United States had ten of the warmest winters in date. In fact, Southern California had the warmest January on record, just a few months ago. And ‘global warming’ does refer only to the United States; it refers to the entire planet. So while the Northern U.S. was advised to stay indoors for fear of cold exposure, Australia was dealing with a record high heat wave (Plumer, 2014). And to further disprove Senator Inhofe, weather is not the same thing as climate. Global warming is just one piece in the huge puzzle that is climate change. One cold snap in the one part of the United States does not erode the entire idea of global warming and climate change. The fact of the matter is, the trends still point to increasing overall temperatures.

Naomi Klein’s book sparked a lot of debate and debacle. She faced much opposition towards the ideas that she proposed, such as an end to capitalism altogether. Some protest is expected, especially from those who profit from environmental destruction. For example, the American Legislative Exchange Council, or ALEC, vehemently opposes climate change movements. The Council has even gone so far as to try to get the Environmental Protection Agency shut down. ALEC wants it abolished mainly because many of the EPA’s proposals and programs will put a damper on ALEC clients profits. Recently the EPA requested that old, dirty power plants be shut down which would increase the reliance on more environmentally friendly natural gas. ALEC’s problem with this proposal is that natural gas is cheap for consumers, thus it lowers profit

possibility (Ludwig, 2014). So big corporations fear any positive action towards climate change because it will impact their profits. This was the expected opposition, especially since Klein blames almost all of the climate crisis on the capitalist systems in which companies involved in ALEC rely on to keep their business booming and their pockets lined. However, Klein faced protest from her own political side as well. With the release of her book, Klein has now been described as having crossed the 'river of fire'. She has the audacity to criticize capitalism, opening herself up to a host of liberal - not conservative - attacks. The liberals want to rein in Klein's ideas because they interfere with the current system at play. However, Klein goes further than the outright disposal of capitalism. She throws out an argument that even the status-quo loving liberals are having a hard time fighting. This argument is that in our current situation, capitalism is threatening the existence of humanity as a whole (Clark & Foster, 2015). It is quite hard to disagree with a policy suggested to help quell the termination of humanity. Though many may not appreciate what Klein has to say, there is no denying that there is truth in her words. The climate is changing and temperatures are rising. And so far, under our capitalistic society, things have only been getting worse.

Humanity will not be able to survive the impending climate catastrophes while still living under capitalism because the system is the cause of the problem. Capitalism seeks to grow and profit without care or attention to the world around it. This of course brings harm to anything that may interfere with growth. Capitalism and business profits rely heavily on manufacturing, which runs on the burning of fossil fuels. These fuels in turn, lead to the heating up and carbon contamination of our atmosphere. The evidence is hard to debate. Carbon emissions started increasing at the start of the Industrial

Revolution in the 1850's, then fell when the economy plummeted during the Great Depression of the 1930's. Whenever the country hits a recession, carbon emissions are lowered. That seems to be an obvious cry for change, yet big businesses and corporations refuse to do anything. There are even people who do not believe global warming and climate change exists, despite overwhelming evidence. This is because global warming is not all about the temperature. Climate is not equal to weather, but the overall trend over a period of time. Crazy snowstorms in the Midwest while California forges into its fourth year of drought highlight the changes occurring in the world's climate. This last year, California has had well below average levels of precipitation and temperatures an average of five degrees Fahrenheit higher than normal (Visser, 2015). The world needs to take note of the crisis going on around us. Something needs to be changed. People need to take to the streets or make efforts to reduce their own carbon footprint. However, it will never be enough. Until the growth driven capitalist economic structure is obliterated, the climate crisis will never be solved. So the world may as well prepare for some very hot years to come.

### **Conclusion**

The United States is supposed to have a traditional democratic government. The people are meant to have a voice in political decisions, law making and the election of ruling officials. The true definition of democracy is rule by the people. However, it has become apparent that the United States is ruled more on the premise of wealth, rather than the voice of the people. The elite, the wealthy one percent, have the most control in the government of this country. The nation that has considered itself the protector of democracy all throughout history, is actually no longer a democracy at all. If anything

can describe the government of the United States it is that of an oligarchy; it is a nation ruled by the wealthy and elite few.

The elite class theory explains the United States in many ways. Those who rule, have only arrived in their positions by sending hundreds of thousands, perhaps even millions of dollars. This has perpetuated a system of corrupt politics and prevented change that may benefit the average middle class or lower class citizen. Oftentimes, the corruption, as well as many other government actions and practices, are kept secret from the rest of the population. In cases such as these, there are people privy to the knowledge of wrong doings, which feel the public has a right to know. These people, those who divulge government or corporate secrets, are called whistleblowers, and the U.S. government harshly prosecutes them. Despite the right to free speech, the government wants to silence all whistleblowers. This is because whistleblowers can threaten many of the practices that help fill politicians pockets. The fact that the government is even trying to such down the peoples constitutional right to freedom of speech, highlights the lack of democracy in the United States. How can the people have a voice in government if that government is limiting or going so far as to take away, the people's right to have a voice? Despite this corruption, the wealthy continue to rule, since all those who attempt to expose them, have been silenced.

A nation ruled by the elite class has a government that seeks profit above all else. This is very true in the United States. Our modern world runs on oil, an expensive and limited resource. In the U.S. people rely on oil for transportation, electricity and manufacturing, among other things. However, oil is nonrenewable. Once it is used up, it will not come back. Due to this concept, many people are in support of the search for



renewable energy sources. Not only would these energy sources be limitless, they are often healthier and cleaner for the environment. Transition America from oil consumption to that of some form of clean energy seems like a simple decision. Yet, the government and big business do not support that move. This is because clean energy is not profitable. Because oil is a limited resources, many of the oil controlling businesses in the United States have full control over prices, which often stay relatively high. The government has even given support to the Keystone pipeline project, an oil pipe that will transport tar sands, the crudest form of oil, from Canada down through the middle of the United States. This pipeline is guaranteed to cause environmental devastation to all ground soil and water nearby. People living near the pipeline site are concerned about their health and their access to clean drinking water. Yet, the government does not care. The pipeline will generate huge profits for politicians and businesspeople alike. The safety of the American people is of no concern to the government, as long as profit is involved.

The government continues its callous attitude even when the fate of the entire planet is threatened. The capitalist ideology that currently runs the United States functions on the prospect of continuous growth. The political and corporate elites find it necessary to expand and develop, wherever they can. However, evidence is showing that the planet is getting hotter, and global warming and climate change are becoming an increasingly larger threat. There is a direct correlation between the continuous expansion of capitalism, and the downfall of the climate. In fact, recent activists are stating that capitalism and the climate cannot peacefully coexist. With capitalism's drive for perpetual growth and the planets fundamental finite nature, something will have to give.

Unfortunately, the government and the elite rulers of the United States are not willing to give up their capitalism due to the profits that they gain. Their greed is destroying the planet.

The elite class theory states that it is the rich and wealthy who hold all the power. Those with the most money are allowed to make the decisions and govern the country. This is seen, with great influence, in the United States. The government and other powerful people are some of the richest people in the country, and they do anything to stay that way. They silence the voice of the people, even though democracy supposedly gives the people a say in government. The leaders of the United States are also ignoring the impending and inevitable environmental catastrophes that will come from their determination to avoid clean energy and their loyalty to capitalism.

In order to reinstate the true traditional democratic system to the United States, the people must take action, despite government opposition. Whistleblowers must forgo the risks and continue to expose corruption within the government. Hopefully, this will help to educate the general public on the more pressing issues in this country such as the suppression of free speech and the destruction of the environment. As people become more educated, they can begin to take a stand, even through small actions such as voting for the best candidate, rather than the richest or most popular one. With time, and serious reconstructions to the way the country is currently run, the United States may be able to function like the Founding Father's dreamed it would: through the voice of the people. In order for that to happen, this country needs to take power out of the hands of those with the deepest pockets, and return it to the control of the everyday average citizen. Maybe

then, the United States can stop the rule by the elite, and begin again to be a country ruled under traditional democracy: a country for the people, and ruled by the people.

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