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Long Meadow October 13, 2001

Born in 1910, I lived through 90 years of the previous century, with its two world wars and uncounted smaller conflicts, massacres, tortures and atrocities. Over one hundred million people died in those years due to the abuses of power that arose when governments became disconnected from the basic human values of their people

Our imaginations are not dark enough or twisted enough to fully comprehend the mass horrors that have been perpetrated upon the people of the world—men, women and little children. If we knew it all—remembered it all—we could not draw another happy breath.

In America, we are more blessed. We have come to expect that our neighbors will not be rounded up ~~and~~ ⁱⁿ masses and shot We have come to expect that we will not ourselves be dragged out of bed and sent away or slain by agents of our government—though these things do happen, even here. While we may distrust an election or a party, we have—most of us—not lost faith in the good intentions of our democracy.

We look around the world. We understand that it is

the absolute power of institutions that allows atrocities, for power is the opposite of sensitivity and accommodation. Power is a monster, a man-eating, woman-eating, child-eating beast that we keep in check but never really kill. In America, our dear Constitution is the amulet we wear to preserve ourselves from its teeth.

Our Constitution gives us our democratic republic, which has as its intention the fragmentation of power, keeping the exercise of power as close as possible to the human scale, and letting power accumulate only where absolutely necessary for the common good of the people. The parchment document of the Constitution is not enough—we also require supportive institutions and sacred processes; we need these five things:

- 1. We need fair and accurate voting systems that we can trust beyond a shadow of a doubt:**
- 2. We need worthy candidates who represent our interests and values and who are free from entangling financial obligations to special interests;**
- 3. We need a free press that takes as a sacred trust its duty to inform the citizenry on the great and small**

issues of the day, regardless of the popular appeal of those stories and regardless of the profitability of providing that coverage;

4. We must be an unhurried society, with each of us given the time and resources to be active citizens, not mere mice on corporative treadmills;

5. We must be an educated people, forever students of the vital issues before us, and also of the history, art and literature that shapes our human sensibilities and our civic and cultural values so that, as a self-governing people, we might govern ourselves well. Our schools must produce citizens.

In many of these five areas, we are now in trouble. The stakes are very high, for the monster of power is never far from the door. It comes in quickly. If I told you that a building full of young people who were making political puppets were summarily arrested and taken away, or that people walking calmly down the street near a political convention were arrested and brutalized for two weeks, what country would you think you were in? If I told you that I was arrested for calmly reciting the Bill of Rights in the U. S. Capitol building, and that I cried when the police tried to pull from my finger a wedding ring that had not been

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removed in sixty-two years, where would you think you were? All of these things—and many more—have happened under the American flag within the last twelve months.

If I told you that a man would be in the White House who lost the popular vote, and who won the electoral vote by virtue of one member of the Supreme Court, who is now promised the Chief Justiceship, what country would you think you had landed in?

It happens quickly and moves swiftly. It is nothing for the forces of raw power to discredit the proper law enforcement agencies and set up new ones, run by political cronies, and with prisons and police of their own to suppress and arrest those who dare protest. It is nothing for raw power to thumb its nose at the interests of world peace or the earth's environment for the sake of corporate expansion and political power. It is nothing for raw power to mistake the flowering of political ideas and dissent in democracy's garden as a dangerous tangle of garden plots and disloyalties.. It can happen quickly It can happen in America. Open your eyes. Open your eyes to our country's bellicose international posturing, to our country's demand for revenge to our country's denial of a search for the answer to this problem of hate, to our country's

turning away from international agreements, to the ignoring of global warming, to continuing to answer our need for a better energy policy one that recognizes the need for a car that uses less gasoline instead of building bigger SUV's for our self gratification.

Never has there been a time in the history of our planet when we so needed intelligent, honorable, leaders, who will cast self-interest into oblivion. We can no longer afford the bribery that now runs rampant in the temples of our democracy.

When a Senator, A Representative, a governor or a mayor takes from an industry or group or company or an immensely wealthy individual, a contribution that will help ensure that politician's political future, a conflict of interest has been created, and they know it and we know it.

We must not break faith with those who dedicated their lives, and lost their lives for our dear Democracy . The essence of that democracy is our ability to choose people at election time who will represent our interests and values, not the person who can raise the most money for his campaign.

In the past thirty years, Americans have become

involved in special interest political organizations, representing certain issues or reforms, instead of investing their energies more directly into political parties. I think we must not divert our reform energies away from the political parties. We must bring our passion for reform to the daily work of the parties. If we stand too far outside the circle of real action, we are accepting the dangerous idea that there is a "them versus us" division in our politics. We are taking the part of the mob at the castle gate, rather than accepting the fact that we, indeed, are a self-governing people. We each have a high personal responsibility to be involved as candidates, supporters, voters, and those who will give wise testimony to the councils of our government.

When those in power attempt to exclude us, we must remind them that they serve at our pleasure, and that we all have a duty to participate, from which they must not discourage us.

To those, on any side of an issue, who would make you angry to the point where you feel like raising a pitchfork, please take a deep breath and remember what Mr. Lincoln told us—that we are engaged in a great experiment to see if a nation "of the people, by the people and for the people, can long endure. Let us

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raise no pitchforks against ourselves. Let us go gently into the parties, the town councils, into the legislatures as fellow citizens who care for the common interests of our communities and of our nations and our planet.

Be involved. Stay involved. Understand what it means to be an American. It means to take responsibility for mature self-governance. In a world where the polar ice and atmosphere ozone levels are thinning daily, and in a world where the divide between the very wealthy and the literally starving, in a world where one child out of five goes to bed hungry, two out of five, if the child is Afro-American, we must assume responsibility. We must take our place at the table of power. There is no shouting that will save us if we cannot lead by responsible example in our homes and in our communities.

Thank-you