

Leadership and Legacy

Upstanding in a Time of Crisis: Leadership Toward Solutions and Embracing Opportunities

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Leadership. People who will stand up.

Never before has our nation, and our world, been in greater need of competent, principled, knowledgeable, far-sighted, non-partisan, inspiring leadership. And never before have we been in such need of what Samantha Power calls “upstanders” – people who will stand up and fight effectively and honestly for solutions, rather than cower in fear of rocking the boat.

Our nation invaded and attacked a country that posed absolutely no security threat to us – all on the basis of a gargantuan fraud. And it did so without a plan as to what we would do after the invasion. (Sounds like our nation’s energy policy!). At a time when the US is investing only \$5 billion per year in research and development of alternative energy sources, we are pouring \$12 billion per month into the big, black hole of disastrous military occupation in Iraq – creating more hostility, more hatred, more terrorism every day we are viewed by the Muslim world as an occupying force.

It's bad enough that we have such a dismal lack of leadership in the White House, but what do the so-called "leaders" in Congress do? These traitors to our Constitution and the rule of law snipe, they complain, they play the worst sorts of politics, but they don't stand up. You can count the "upstanders" in Congress on one hand – and probably a hand that lost a finger or two in a rip saw accident.

Instead of leaders, instead of "upstanders," we have wannabe dictators in the White House who have contemptuously violated our Constitution, our treaty obligations, and domestic law, while declaring that, during this so-called war on terror, their power is unconstrained. So they lie to us and commit felonies under laws passed by Congress, as they secretly order the warrantless electronic surveillance of telephone conversations and email correspondence. For the first time in our nation's history, these immoral hypocrites, with a Congress that appears, in bi-partisan fashion, to be mostly sound asleep, cause people around the world to be kidnapped, disappeared, and tortured, dragging our nation down to the same moral sewer inhabited by tyrannies in other countries from whom we used to be so proud to distinguish ourselves. But, we have become like them.

We must all ask: "What kind of legacy are we leaving?"

Consider what Lee Iacocca, former CEO of Chrysler Corporation, has to say in his excellent book, *Where Have All the Leaders Gone?* Iacocca writes:

Had Enough? Am I the only guy in this country who's fed up with what's happening? Where the hell is our outrage? We should be screaming bloody murder. We've got a gang of clueless bozos steering our ship of state right over a cliff, we've got corporate gangsters stealing us blind, and we can't even clean up after a hurricane much less build a hybrid car. But instead of getting mad, everyone sits around and nods their heads when the politicians say, "Stay the course."

Stay the course? You've got to be kidding. This is America, not the damned Titanic. . . . Someone has to speak up. I hardly recognize this country anymore. The President of the United States is given a free pass to ignore the Constitution, tap our phones, and lead us to war on a pack of lies. Congress responds to record deficits by

passing a huge tax cut for the wealthy. While we're fiddling in Iraq, the Middle East is burning and nobody seems to know what to do.

This is the same Lee Iacocca who blasted Congress when Ford and GM convinced it to back off fuel efficiency standards in the mid-1980s. In classic fashion, Iacocca then declared, "We are about to put up a tombstone, saying: 'Here lies America's energy policy.'" A Chrysler advertisement in 1985, placed in the New York Times, said, "If CAFE is weakened now, come the next energy crunch American manufacturers will not be able to meet the demand for fuel-efficient cars."

Now, there was real leadership! The CEO of an automobile manufacturer actually calling for more ambitious fuel efficiency standards. Iacocca didn't just have his eye on the next quarter's financial statements; he was looking down the road several years, recognizing that if Detroit didn't start putting out cars that ran on less gas, manufacturers from other nations would take the lead.

So what happened after decades of Congress bowing to the resistance of Ford and GM to more stringent fuel-efficiency standards? GM and Ford's debt was reduced to junk bond status, GM is worth less than Harley-Davidson, and the top three auto manufacturers are now outside the US.

We can all point the finger of blame at whoever is in the White House. We can point to Congress. And we can even, at times, point to the courts. But the ultimate responsibility, particularly in a democracy where we have the freedom to speak and to assemble, is ours. If we are not "upstanders", if we do not provide principled, effective leadership, we are to blame.

"All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing." That statement, often wrongly attributed to Edmund Burke, is a strong reminder of our responsibility to act and the consequences if we do not.

Recall also the misquote by John F. Kennedy, wrongly crediting Dante: "The hottest places in hell are reserved for those who in a period of moral crisis maintain their neutrality."

Although these statements are frequently misattributed, they have probably endured because they are so compelling. The point is that we may have good intentions and good values – but if we are not “upstanders” – if we do not stand up and challenge wrongdoing where and when we can – we too are culpable.

Consider two related observations of Martin Luther King, Jr.:

“In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends.”

And: *“Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.”*

As tragic and as wasteful of lives and resources as the Iraq debacle has been, over the long-term, if we do not take effective, aggressive, urgent action, nothing will match the devastating consequences of the warming of our planet – the transformation of Earth to a largely uninhabitable place – due primarily to the burning of coal, oil, and gas.

In the face of this growing catastrophe, we are faced with the same absence of competent, principled, far-sighted leadership – leadership that acts with integrity and in the public interest. Those in power have been self-serving and dishonest, manipulating scientific reports and doing all they can to mislead the public. They have served the interests of their Saudi tyrant friends and the rapacious oil and coal companies, as they cavalierly dismiss the devastating consequences to the inhabitants of our planet, now and far into the future.

The consequences experienced already from human-caused global warming include the severe melting of glaciers around the world, the Arctic Ice Cap, parts of Greenland, and the Antarctic; rising oceans; desertification of millions of acres of previously productive lands; the killing of major coral reefs; the destruction of major forests by bark beetles that now survive warmer winters; major droughts; and significantly reduced snowpack in areas that depend upon snowpack for water supplies.

Business-as-usual spells disaster for our Earth and for many, if not most, of its inhabitants. Hundreds of millions of people will be driven by rising oceans from their coastal-area homes; water will be unavailable to

farmers and others depending on major glacial systems, including the Himalayas and the Tibet-Qinghai Plateau, which feed all the major rivers of Asia; forests will be killed off at a rapidly-increasing rate; deserts will expand; fisheries will collapse; many species will become extinct; and heat waves will kill more and more people. Planet Earth will be a very different, far less habitable place for our children and those who follow.

The solutions are at hand, if we act aggressively, treating the situation as the emergency it is – an emergency that far surpasses the attack on Pearl Harbor or the threat of terrorism. The challenge facing us is of the greatest significance humankind has ever experienced – and it presents us with tremendous positive opportunities if we will only embrace them.

With so much at stake, many of those with the greatest power in our country (I certainly won't call them "leaders"), have lied to us, with their campaigns of misinformation, in which much of the federal government has conspired and in which the mainstream media has been complicit, telling us the virtues of "clean coal" – when no such thing exists, and won't exist in time to stop irreversible, catastrophic climate disruption – telling us that nuclear power is going to save us from climate change – when it is impossible to build safe nuclear power plants, and to assure the safe storage and transportation of the most toxic materials on the face of our planet, in time to stop catastrophic climate disruption – and parroting the fiction that combating climate change will be economically devastating, when it is abundantly clear that the real economic devastation will result from the failure to take aggressive action to radically reduce the emission of greenhouse gases.

Speaking of the complicity of the media, the League of Conservation Voters analyzed transcripts of TV interviews and debates with the Democratic and Republican candidates. As of January 25, five prime-time journalists had conducted 171 interviews with the candidates. Of the 2,975 questions they asked, only six mentioned the words "climate change" or "global warming". What has happened to our media when we hear more about Barack Obama's former minister or what lapel pin Obama wears or doesn't wear – and even more about which starlet is going through substance abuse treatment or whether they are wearing underwear – than about the urgent threat to our planet and to its inhabitants?

In the end it will come down to leadership – and to whether people will be “upstanders” – standing up, even against vocal, well financed, powerful opposition, and demanding that our nation, and the international community, rise to the challenge.

Will we stop the building of coal burning power plants and phase out existing ones?

Will we retool our industrial sector as we did during World War II, mobilizing the creativity and determination of the American people to conserve precious resources and to develop, build, and implement clean, renewable sources of energy – while at the same time building a stronger, more sustainable economy?

Will we export clean renewable energy technologies to other countries, helping them as we did Europe with the Marshall Plan? If we could spend more on bailing out the thrift and loans than the cost of the Marshall Plan and the bailouts of Chrysler, Lockheed, Penn Central, and New York City combined, we should be making at least that same level of investment in researching, developing, manufacturing, and implementing clean, renewable sources of energy like wind, solar, geothermal, tidal, and ground heat energy.

I have worked on climate change policy and practices for many years. When I was Mayor of Salt Lake City, with ICLEI’s tremendous help, we were able to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in municipal operations by 31% in just four years. My work is driven by optimism – and by a profound hope that we will do the right things quickly enough to make the difference. And it is driven by the same passion that led me to swear on the night my son was born that I will do everything I can to make this a better world for him and his children.

Finally, my optimism is driven by people like you – upstanders and leaders who are smart enough and informed enough to know what we’re facing and principled and courageous enough to take up the challenge, even in the face of a stubborn, selfish, misinformed and misinforming opposition.

I am optimistic when I see ICLEI and its incredibly hard-working staff, under the remarkable direction of Michelle Wyman, its outstanding Board, funding partners, mayors, and committed municipal staff members

focus so effectively on achieving real, meaningful results, in cities all over the country.

I am optimistic when I see mayors and staff people like many here tonight who have stood up, often alone, to educate their communities about the need to take aggressive action and to implement model programs that serve as an inspiration and motivation for others.

When I see mayors who will stand up against their state legislatures and other powerful interests like the coal or utility industries, it gives me hope for the future, and brings me joy to know that, in response to the title of Lee Iacocca's book, "Here are leaders. Here are people who will stand up, take on the slackers and the global-warming-profiteers, and be bold enough and effective enough to move our nation and our world toward a safer, more secure place."

Thank you all for your leadership. Thank you for being upstanders. Thank you for tackling the challenges posed by climate change, with the recognition of what is at stake, and for embracing the positive opportunities presented to us. Your work will save lives and save species. Your work will improve the quality of life. And your work, at such a pivotal moment in the history of civilization, will help build a safer, healthier, more compassionate world.