

Justice Party Presidential Candidate Rocky Anderson Speaks Candidly on the Crumbling State of the Union

Sunday, 26 August 2012 00:00 By [Ron Boyer](#), Truthout | Interview



Justice Party presidential candidate Rocky Anderson. (Photo courtesy of Rocky Anderson)

I first heard of Ross Carl "Rocky" Anderson through a politically savvy, liberal friend in Santa Barbara, California. More disillusioned and cynical about American politics than ever due to my disappointment in the administration of President Barack Obama, I set aside my friend's invitation to meet Anderson and learn more about his newly formed Justice Party and announced candidacy for President of the United States. "Just what we need," I told myself at the time, "another false promise of hope we can believe in."

When a second invitation to meet Anderson was unexpectedly offered, this time from a mutual friend with long-term Berkeley activist credentials, I decided to give him a second look. With endorsements from Ralph Nader and other bonafide progressive political leaders to his credit, I joined Anderson's campaign entourage for a day in the San Francisco Bay Area. The interview was mostly conducted as we drove from one informal political meeting to the next, fighting traffic all the way while driving from an intimate conversation with a half dozen progressive leaders at former San Francisco Supervisor Chris Daly's bar to a speech to old-school Berkeley activists at a local church, complete with vegetarian potluck, 60s protest songs, and an unanticipated in-person endorsement from the progressive current mayor of Richmond, California, Gayle McLaughlin.

[Click here to support news free of corporate influence by donating to Truthout.](#)

As I spent time with Anderson and the interview developed, an interesting picture began to emerge: Rocky Anderson is a paradox. A popular two-term mayor of Salt Lake City, which is situated in the heartland of one of the "reddest" states in America, he was the only major urban mayor in the nation to call for the impeachment of President George W. Bush. A soft-spoken, clearly electable, youthful boy-next-door, Anderson's candid, articulate political views belie his clean-cut, conservative presentation: Here is a decent middle-American kind of guy my conservative family members would like, or perhaps even vote for, and yet, his political views are consistently aligned with my own progressive leftist policy positions. Anderson sees global warming as the greatest threat to humanity, big money's influence in politics as the greatest enemy of our struggling democracy, and the current two-party, corporate-owned political system in America as an increasingly anti-constitutional tyranny, in the literal sense of the word.

A strong supporter of the Occupy movement, Anderson fears our government's moves to crush dissent. As an attorney whose practice included civil rights and constitutional law, and as a committed advocate for the rule of law and human rights, he sternly challenges the Obama administration's passage of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) and would support an independent Congressional investigation into what actually happened on 9/11 and would hold responsible parties accountable.

As we rode from one small, casual group meeting to the next, loosely organized by a handful of committed, grassroots activist volunteers, I couldn't help but think how sharply Anderson's campaign contrasted with the well-oiled, well-financed campaign machinery of the Republicans and Democrats - and how different his thoughtful viewpoint sounds from the mainstream narratives that dictate our view of reality from the bully pulpits of the mass media.

Is Rocky Anderson a veritable Don Quixote of post-modern American politics, tilting at the windmills of the national political establishment, where the Big Game seems well rigged? Or is he another visionary voice crying in the wilderness against the perils of American plutocracy? In the present context, both metaphors offer more than a grain of truth. But whether he is a postmodern prophet or a quixotic idealist is for history to decide.

Speaking personally, I prefer to think of Anderson's run for the presidency as the (increasingly less) lonely quest of a decent, courageous and honorable man - a political underdog's journey along a road "less traveled by." And, to paraphrase the poet Robert Frost, author of that fine metaphor: That just might make all the difference.

Ron Boyer: Why did you decide to create the Justice Party and run for President of the United States? And, perhaps as important: Why now?

Rocky Anderson: Our nation has been transformed in extraordinarily tragic ways in the past dozen years. The rule of law has been utterly eviscerated during the Bush and Obama administrations. We've engaged in wars of aggression, wars for which there has been no coherent explanation. Our debt is completely out of control. We have a military-industrial complex with a stranglehold on our government. And at the core of almost every public policy failure, all we have to do to find an explanation is follow the money, because our Congress and the White House have been purchased lock, stock and barrel by wealthy corporate interests.

The Republican and Democratic Parties have colluded in creating the corrupt, perverse system that has led our nation to this point today. And there is now no question in my mind that we need a major new alternative. There are some great third parties in this country, but none of them have a history of winning elections. They simply don't resonate with a broad enough political base either to succeed in winning or in helping create a long-term, sustained movement for significant change in this country.

RB: Can you say more about why you decided to run and why you think you're qualified to lead?

RA: I resisted running in the beginning because, frankly, a campaign for president is overwhelming. And I know we're up against great odds. However, after considering the matter for two or three months, I came to the conclusion that this is something I have to do if I'm going to be able to say that I did everything I could to get our nation back on track.

This isn't only about the American people. This is about the future of our world. There are issues I've worked on for a number of years that aren't being dealt with in an effective way by our government, principally because of the corrupting influence of money.

For instance, I've worked for many years to combat climate change. When I was mayor of Salt Lake City, I committed that we'd abide by the Kyoto Protocol goals in our municipal operations. We far exceeded those goals, reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 31 percent in three years. I then worked with dozens of mayors from around the country and teamed up with Robert Redford to bring them to the Sundance Summit - every year for three years - to not only provide scientific information for mayors, but to provide them with communication skills and expose them to best practices from cities around the country.

I'm convinced that climate change poses, by far, the greatest risk to humanity. And the failure of essential US leadership in the international community will end up having devastating consequences.

RB: Obviously, with the ascendancy of Sarah Palin in the last election cycle, it's quite possible for someone with mayoral experience to create a platform and an audience at the national level. And after all, Salt Lake City is certainly no Wasilla, Alaska.

You apparently, despite all the problems you're suggesting, believe in changing the system from within. Many of your presumably natural constituents, like members of the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement, may not.

RA: First of all, there really is no comparison between Sarah Palin and me. I oversaw a general fund budget of over \$200 million - plus a huge redevelopment agency and a major international airport - for eight years. I dealt with thousands of public employees in three public employee unions. I've had infinitely more management and executive experience than someone like Barack Obama before he was elected to the White House. Certainly far more than anybody like Sarah Palin ever had.

But perhaps even more importantly, I've shown, in my professional community and public service commitments, a deep understanding of what we need to do in our local communities and throughout our nation if we're going to deal with major problems that impact all of us. Everything from fiscal responsibility to restorative justice, creating good jobs by building a sustainable economy, and confronting the horrendous problem of climate change.

RB: Say more about your belief in changing the system from within.

RA: In order to change the system, we need to approach it from every direction possible. The anti-slavery movement, the women's suffrage movement, the civil rights movement, the labor movement - all were successful because of tenacious action by committed people at the grassroots willing to organize and act, sometimes year after year, to meet their goals. But real change can certainly be facilitated if we have people in elective office that can both change public policy and urge the American people on to push for change. Certainly that was demonstrated by Franklin Roosevelt, who proposed some fairly radical solutions in his time, and knew how to fight for them and build public support along the way.

So, I would say to anyone who has given up on the electoral system that we need to push from every direction. Keep up the fight on the outside, but also never turn your back on the electoral system, particularly when there are candidates willing to fight for your compatriots. Those who have become so cynical and resigned that they refuse even to vote are, in a certain sense, declaring defeat and are part of the problem.

RB: I recently saw a video clip of Michael Moore on his knees begging Ralph Nader not to run for president this time. What's your reply to the spoiler issue?

RA: If we allow the fear-driven argument that the lesser of two evils (in this case I think we could say the more effective of the two evils) may be defeated by the greater of two evils, then we're simply conceding to the status quo. Then we'll never see a change. In fact, we'll see things continue to get worse, with the ratcheting up of an imperial presidency, with the undermining of the rule of law and our constitutional values, and a continued destruction of our democracy, as well as a worsening economic disparity - which is already worse than at any time since the 1920s and during the Great Depression.

We can either choose to simply move the players - Republicans and Democrats - around and sustain the corrupt system in which those with the money call all the shots, or we can finally organize and take action together to choose a very different way. And that's what my candidacy represents, and that's what the Justice Party represents.

A corollary to that argument concerning the spoiler issue is that we, at some point, must draw the line, both as American citizens and moral actors. People need to put it in perspective. I don't think there are many who would now consider voting for someone who promises to halt wars of aggression and then sends in more troops, who continues to refuse to hold people accountable under the law for war crimes, or targets US citizens for assassination without any semblance of due process, all of which President Obama has done.

Where do we draw the line and say: How can any American support a president for re-election who would ask for the power, as President Obama did in 2009, and then sign into law the NDAA that provides the President with the power to point to anyone in the world, including US citizens, to have them essentially kidnapped, disappeared and indefinitely detained without charges, without trial, without habeas corpus, even without legal assistance? It's probably the most subversive, anti-American act ever undertaken by the United States Congress and the president.

And if the American people can't draw the line because of this fear that a president who would engage in those kinds of acts might not be elected instead of the Republican nominee, then we have become transformed into a very different and dangerous nation of people.

RB: I think top Democratic Party strategists - reportedly, for example, David Axelrod - are banking that those of us on the left whom Obama has alienated since he was elected, for the reasons you're discussing, will realize that we have to vote for Obama again because: "Think how much worse it would be if a Republican was in the White House again!" They have a point.

But there are also a growing number of people, myself included, who think it's perhaps better to let the heavens fall and have a Sarah Palin or a Mitt Romney with their finger on the nuclear bomb, because maybe the crisis just needs to get so bad that Americans will wake up.

RA: We, the American people, need to get beyond our timidity and assert ourselves if we're ever going to see the kind of change that's necessary to move back in the direction of democracy and away from plutocracy. If we re-elect President Obama simply because of our fear that somebody else might be elected, then he is what we deserve. I think we're a better country than that. I think the world deserves better than a president of the United States who so cavalierly sends unmanned drones over other nations without any authorization by Congress, in complete violation of the war powers clause. The presidency has become far more imperial than even under George W. Bush. I didn't think that would be possible.

I, like so many Americans, thought that we would finally see a restoration of the rule of law, a return to separation of powers and our system of checks and balances. Instead, the Obama administration has been even more aggressive in its endorsement of the doctrine of state secrets privilege, essentially removing the courts from the constitutional formula, the system of checks and balances and separation of powers. That is the very definition of tyranny.

I don't think that's what the American people want. I'm not sure that most people understand that's exactly what we're getting with President Obama. And it will continue to get worse if we support his re-election simply on the basis of fear someone else might be elected instead. We do have an opportunity to come together and overthrow the dictatorship of corrupt money and elect to the presidency someone who will do everything possible to change the system. And who will help restore the rule of law, including compliance with the war powers clause and the due process clause of the Constitution.

RB: Do you really think you can create a viable third party on the progressive left and do it before November? Or is there a different kind of strategy for the long term involved here?

RA: You don't know what the possibilities are until you try them. Whoever dreamt that the Arab awakening would occur? Yet the people of Tunisia, Egypt and Libya organized together, through the democratized means of communication offered by social media. They were successful in overthrowing their dictators.

We're powerful enough in this country, using some of the same tools and organizing strategies, to overthrow the corrupting influence of money that has served as essentially a dictator in this nation. We're powerful enough to demand the restoration of the rule of law, a return to essential constitutional values. If only we will. So, certainly it's in the realm of possibility. And it would be a magnificent thing to see happen.

But even if it doesn't, we have the opportunity to communicate with the American people to help further the movement for major reforms. And as has occurred at other times in our nation's history, a major third party movement, even if it is not successful on Election Day, can create the conditions for the changes that we're talking about to ultimately be implemented.

RB: What's the feasibility of forming some kind of coalition party on the left that represents the constituencies of all these splinter groups - the Justice Party, the Greens, etcetera - and have some kind of broad coalition of progressives with a substantial percentage of the American people to start with as a base to build on?

RA: I think this is a perfect time for third parties to come together under one unified banner, perhaps set aside some of our differences and join in providing the kind of option the majority of the American people want to see in the coming election. I would be very pleased to work with the Greens, the Peace and Freedom Party, the Progressive Party, with the Libertarian Party, with Independents - with people of all stripes - in allowing a real choice, rather than creating several different factions and limiting the choices to small parties on either the left or the right of the political spectrum. And bring people together, focusing on our major common concerns and common aspirations.

RB: You alluded to the Arab Spring as a metaphor for possibility. We've experienced our own version of that with the American Autumn and what look to be interesting times ahead for the OWS or Occupy movement.

What do you make of Occupy, and of the mainstream media claims that OWS leaders didn't have a clear message or demand? Isn't the problem rather that there are far too many major, urgent policy issues now that it's impossible to pack them into sound bites?

RA: It seemed to me, almost from the beginning, that the message was coming through very loudly and clearly from the Occupy movement, which is that the wealthiest 1% have been benefiting at the tremendous expense of the 99%. There has never been such division between a very small, elite, financial aristocracy and the rest of us in this country since the Gilded Age - and what some call the "extended" Gilded Age, through the 1920s.

We know that government policy can help produce a healthy, thriving middle class where there's greater opportunity for everyone. And yet our government leaders have been doing the bidding of those who help buy their way into Congress and the White House through such means as deregulation of financial institutions and turning a blind eye to the massive financial fraud on Wall Street, all of which led to the financial meltdown from which so many of us are still reeling, not only in this country, but around the world. I think the Occupy movement has been an incredibly healthy phenomenon, and I hope that it continues for a long time into the future.

During the years when I was mayor, we would hold major demonstrations each time President Bush came to town. I lamented that we had to do far more than just hold a few demonstrations. I wondered at the time, Why aren't people out in the streets? When we were led into an illegal war of aggression based on a pack of lies, we were engaging, for the first time in our nation's history, in war crimes - like waterboarding - as a matter of official policy. Our president was getting away with felonious, warrantless wiretapping of American citizens.

And yet the American people were so relatively quiet and complacent. That, to me, was the most dangerous signal. Because we know that people in power oftentimes are going to abuse their power. But if the people will not hold them in check, and our other institutions, like our courts, will not hold them in check, then we're on the path towards totalitarianism.

RB: I read an article a few months ago in Wired where the author, James Bamford, described former senior National Security Agency (NSA) official William Binney as pinching his thumb and forefinger close together, saying, "We are that far" from being a "turnkey totalitarian state" in this country. You seem to be suggesting that as well.

Are we on the slippery slope toward fascist totalitarianism?

RA: I'm very reluctant to use words like fascism, totalitarianism or tyranny. But at the same time, we need to face the truth if we're going to reverse this dangerous course our country is on. When you consider that during the last 12 years, our country has become so very different than the republic we've known since its very founding, we've got to face up to the truth.

At Nuremberg, we prosecuted and convicted people engaging in aggressive war. There's no question that we, the United States, have been engaged in aggressive wars. And in pursuit of those wars, we have committed some of the most heinous human rights offenses. The president just recently issued an executive order that basically places all industry, all agriculture and all commerce in this country under the control of the president for national security purposes. That is part and parcel of a fascist government.

We've become a government now that engages in surveillance of American citizens' communications. And it's almost accepted now, over the past 12 years, when before that we would have been outraged as American citizens that our government was invading our privacy in such a way. And now, of course, the idea that the executive branch has the power to round people up and hold them indefinitely without any semblance of due process - that's certainly a clear sign of a totalitarian government.

Every generation has such enormous responsibility to preserve our republic, to preserve our constitutional system of government, including the system of checks and balances - to stand up against an imperial presidency that assumes so much power for itself and undermines the power of other branches to hold abuses of excess power in check. That's our challenge, and also our great opportunity. And again, it's not only as American citizens, but as moral actors, that we have this obligation and opportunity to reverse the dangerous course our nation is on.

RB: Earlier we were discussing the Occupy movement and the complexity of the issues, which would seem to be a bit of a challenge for you, as well. Can you give us your sound-bite version of your campaign platform, with the top three or four policy issues that you'll address?

Also, what will it take to unravel this mythical Gordian knot that we're in? There are so many interconnected issues. How do we begin to unravel it?

RA: Compliance with the war powers clause would keep us out of the disastrous wars we've been fighting ever since at least Vietnam. Imagine if Congress lived up to its constitutional responsibility to determine whether the facts justify going to war. We would have never gone into Vietnam. We never would have been in Iraq. And it's very likely we would not have been in Afghanistan.

We need significant campaign finance reform, with a public financing system. We need to reverse the Citizens United case. If that took a constitutional amendment, it would be very worthwhile, because the role of money in our campaign system is in large part responsible for the transformation of our democracy into a plutocracy - the control of our government by the very wealthy. We need to restore the rule of law, and live up to the promise that our nation has made, ever since its founding, that we would honor and recognize individual civil rights and liberties instead of indefinite detention without charges, trial or habeas corpus. We would get back to the basics in terms of due process for everyone.

And we need to join with the rest of the industrialized world and finally recognize the fundamental moral obligation that we, as a people, should have: to provide essential health care for everyone. People are dying simply because they cannot afford decent medical care in this country. We have the worst record in the industrialized world, except for Latvia, in the number of newborn babies who die because of the lack of prenatal and neonatal care. We have one of the highest death rates for people because of diabetes. We have an extremely high maternal death rate because of lack of health care coverage. This is a matter of tremendous national and individual tragedy in this country, and it's all happened because of the corrupting influence of money from the for-profit insurance and pharmaceutical industries.

A major transformation in these areas is required, and it's going to take leadership from the very top to turn things around. That's why I'm running for president, and that's why I encourage everyone to no longer be satisfied with the Republican and Democratic Parties and their candidates, who have brought us to this point where we are today.

RB: From a pragmatic standpoint, let's say by some miracle you wind up in the White House. How do you tackle the issues you just described when, from an institutional standpoint, you're surrounded by a Supreme Court that thinks corporations are people, a corrupt and obstinate group of Republicans who think Obama and any Democrats in Congress are "communists" (when, in my opinion, for the most part they really are, with the exception of a few, just ineffective pseudo-liberals).

On top of that, we have a mass media - the so-called Fourth Estate - that's really looking more and more like a propaganda machine for the official infotainment narrative than authentic journalism. It really looks like The People are surrounded.

RA: You have to empower the American people. In every progressive social movement in this country, change came about because of the tenacious activism of people who were willing to take to the streets to push their elected representatives till they did the right thing. Congress and the White House have been acting against the interests of the American people, and just about everybody in this nation knows not only that they've been doing that, but the reasons why.

FDR was up against enormous challenges, and he made his case to the American people, who made it clear to Congress that they were expected to take action. Imagine being without a precedent like Social Security, or Medicare or Medicaid, getting Congress to pass the Social Security Act. That came about because we had somebody in the White House who cared deeply, who was committed to major change, and who brought the American people along with him. This can be done. But not as long as corporate money is always calling the shots with Congress and the White House.

It's actually a time for great optimism if the American people will come together to overthrow the dictatorship of corrupt money, and call for a return of the rule of law, and getting back to the basics and turning the tide against the tyranny and totalitarianism that has been overtaking our country because of the collusion of both Republicans and Democrats.

RB: I was an early supporter of Barack Obama. I found him to be a brilliant, seemingly progressive orator. But within weeks of his inauguration, he surrounded himself with dozens of key advisers and cabinet members. Every single one - Republican and Democrat alike - had professional ties to either the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) or Project for the New American Century (PNAC), or both - which frankly shocked me. From that point on, it's been, predictably, one betrayal of his base after another.

What do you have to say about those organizations and how you'd approach the matter of naming your advisers differently? And how can we trust you or anyone to be different? Despite the bold campaign rhetoric, we obviously did not get "change we can believe in."

RA: Although I favored Barack Obama over McCain, or at least the McCain who was running for president, who was very different than the McCain we all thought we knew before his running in that campaign. But I did not have much hope, and I warned a lot of my friends who were Obama supporters that they were going to be vastly disappointed.

Instead of falling for the campaign slogans and public-relations hype, I always urge people to take a look at what candidates have done before they got involved in politics. Where are their true passions? What have they devoted themselves to, if anything?

I have a record of my entire adult life fighting for civil and human rights, of implementing programs that were aimed at solving problems rather than simply following the polls. I don't think that Barack Obama has any of that kind of record. He was an opportunist in the Illinois Legislature, basically in the hip pocket of the nuclear power industry. He did absolutely nothing to distinguish himself when he was a US Senator. He played it safe at every turn, never stood up against torture or against our continued illegal occupation of Iraq. In fact, he voted consistently for full funding of the occupation.

He promised, before he received the Democratic Party nomination, that he would join a filibuster to block proposed legislation to grant telecommunications companies' retroactive immunity for felonies they'd committed in working with the Bush administration and its illegal surveillance program. As soon as he received the nomination, he betrayed that promise and actually voted *for* the retroactive immunity, caving to the lobbying blitz after the telecommunications companies spent millions of dollars on their lobbyists to obtain those special favors from Congress.

Other than Eric Holder, there has not been one person in a top leadership position in the Obama administration who opposed our invasion and occupation of Iraq. [Obama has] shown his true colors, but he showed those colors before he was elected president of the United States. I think, because people wanted an alternative to George W. Bush, they were irrationally exuberant about Barack Obama.

The American people have an opportunity for the real thing now. If you look at my record, both as practicing lawyer and my involvement in the community, the service I gave to the Utah American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), the Planned Parenthood Association of Utah, Common Cause, Guadalupe School's educational programs - all of the work I did as a volunteer with those organizations - you'll see where my commitment was. Then, of course, my eight years as mayor of Salt Lake City, being one of the top activists among public officials around the world on the issue of climate change. Then the restorative justice programs and my opposition to the so-called war on drugs.

I was the only major city mayor who advocated for the impeachment of George W. Bush. And I hope people, looking back, will realize that was exactly the course this nation should have taken. The impeachment clause was written into the constitution to remove a president who would resort to gross deception of the American people and of Congress in order to make war against another country. A president who placed himself above the law - as what he called the leader of the "unitary executive branch" - assuming dictatorial powers, claiming that he was not bound by laws passed by Congress, including the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA).

As mayor of Salt Lake City, I took on a lot of powerful institutions and a lot of powerful people. I did it not out of a commitment to my own political future, but to fundamental principle. That's the way I've always conducted myself, and that's how I will conduct myself as president of the United States.

RB: Speaking of the Bush administration, I'd like pick up a specific thread. I thought we could start with Jason Leopold's excellent article on torture a few months ago after Truthout obtained a lot of information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). There is a very interesting piece that Leopold wrote based on those FOIA documents that basically indicates that the CIA tortured al-Qaeda members not essentially for intelligence purposes, but for propaganda purposes: to create false testimony to bolster government falsehoods, not to gather actionable intelligence.

Obama gave the presumed war criminals in the Bush White House a free pass - will you?

RA: My approach is very simple, and it's one that any president of the United States - or any true patriot - should take, which is: This is a nation where there should be equal justice for all. Anyone who violates the law should be held accountable, no matter how wealthy, no matter their position of power or former position of power. The law should apply to everyone alike.

I will insist on investigations. If Congress will not undertake investigations, as in the 1970s with the Church Committee, to ascertain what abuses took place and who was responsible, and to determine what measures can be taken to make certain such things don't happen in the future, I will create an independent commission to undertake such an investigation and disclosure to the American people.

RB: These kinds of issues take us down the rabbit hole a bit. I'd like to continue in that direction. How about the illegal wars that started based on, I believe, the pretext of 9/11?

I think anyone who has done their homework knows we went to war in Afghanistan to protect, among other things, the Unocal consortium's oil pipeline. It's not coincidental that we built our strategic military bases along that pipeline, and that we appointed an Afghan president who was closely tied to the oil industry.

Peter Dale Scott and others have written extensively about "deep government" and the role of the CIA promoting the Afghani heroin and hashish trade to the West, and similar actions deemed essential to secret government operations.

Acknowledging such dark realities represents a serious critique of the official 9/11 narrative spin, and our true collective identity as a nation, does it not?

RA: Our nation has a long history of overthrowing governments where we thought we could profit. We overthrew democratically elected governments in Iran, in Guatemala, and tried to overthrow the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. All those operations were CIA orchestrations and completely illegal. Even Sen. Barry Goldwater blasted the CIA for mining the port of Corinto in Nicaragua. We're up to the same thing now, but we're expanding these wars, most of the time on false pretense.

At Nuremberg, the prosecutor was Chief Justice of the US Supreme Court, Robert Jackson. In his opening remarks, Justice Jackson talked about the international crime of aggressive war. And he stated at that point that this prohibition was laid out expressly in the Kellogg-Briand Pact, and

that if the prohibition of wars of aggression, the greatest threat to people around the world, was to have any meaning, then it had to be applied in a principled fashion not just against aggressor Germany at the Nuremberg tribunal, but in the future against all nations, including those sitting in judgment at Nuremberg.

We - as a nation and as a people - seem to have completely lost sight of the illegality of aggressive war. Aggressive war, of course, is a military attack against *any* nation, unless that nation has attacked or was about to attack the aggressor nation.

I'm strongly in favor of a fact-finding investigation where the truth can finally be laid out for the American people. These wars have been fought in our name. They've been financed by our nation. They've been devastating to people who have served and their families and other loved ones. Of course, they've been immensely tragic to people in the nations against whom we've pursued this aggression. There have been 1 million Iraqi people whose lives have been lost, directly or indirectly, as a result of our invasion and occupation of Iraq.

There must be some kind of accountability, even if not criminal prosecutions, even if not an international tribunal as in Nuremberg. The truth must come out. And not only in connection with the commission of these wars, but also the lies that led us into the wars. It's astounding to me that President Bush and other members of his administration could have so blatantly lied to the American people and withhold information that was in their possession in leading our nation to war. At least history should hold these people, who so blatantly lied to us, accountable.

Accountability should also be provided with regard to those in Congress who unconstitutionally delegated to President Bush the power to take our nation to war on his decision rather than, as the Constitution provides, on the basis of findings and an ultimate decision by Congress, which has the sole prerogative to decide whether our nation goes to war. Only a handful of members of the United States Senate even bothered to walk to a secure room in the Capitol, where a National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) was available for them to read.

If they had read that NIE, they would have found that there was huge disagreement within the intelligence community about the representations being made by the Bush administration as a justification for making war against Iraq. For example, the Department of Energy (DOE) and the intelligence agency within the State Department completely disagreed with the claim that aluminum tubes being obtained by the Iraq government were suitable for enriching uranium for the purpose of making nuclear weapons. Likewise, the intelligence agency within the State Department said that it was very unlikely that Saddam Hussein had tried to purchase uranium from Niger.

The really shocking fact, that I think most Americans don't realize, is that 12 days before our invasion of Iraq, Mohamed ElBaradei, the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), disclosed that the documents solely relied upon by the Bush administration for its claim that Saddam Hussein was trying to purchase uranium from Niger were blatant forgeries. There was a small article in The Washington Post about that, then nothing else.

I remember exclaiming, when I saw that article in the Post, that this should be front page headline news throughout the country, since it went to the main premise underlying the Bush administration's claim that we should be going to war against Iraq. I think what we saw in Utah daily newspapers was typical of what went on around the rest of the country, and that was that there was not a word about this disclosure concerning the forgeries until some three and a half months after our invasion of Iraq, and well after President Bush had claimed victory.

RB: Let's talk more about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. And, of course, we're doing a lot of saber rattling around Iran right now, as well.

In terms of our government's darker motives for these wars, let's go back to the Project for the New American Century (PNAC) - unofficially referred to in Washington, DC circles, reportedly by the first Bush administration, as the "crazies." PNAC's membership consisted of Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, Scooter Libby, Douglas Feith, et al - the usual suspects, all top Bush administration officials.

Apparently, this very same group of guys - who were in charge during 9/11, and who instigated these illegal wars - had publicly called for war in the Middle East back in the 90s to protect American hegemony as the sole world superpower after the fall of the Iron Curtain.

In a controversial policy paper, PNAC reportedly called for a "new" Pearl Harbor, alluding to the pretext for war that FDR allegedly used to get us into WWII. The author David Ray Griffin has written extensively and convincingly about this and other facts surrounding 9/11, raising a host of basic questions of formal logic that still remain unanswered, in spite of (or some would say, because of) the 9/11 Commission.

Was it an inside job? As president, can we count on you to launch a serious independent investigation of what actually happened on 9/11?

RA: I don't think anybody can say that it was an inside job, because there are too many questions that remain unanswered. And the American people deserve conclusive answers following a thorough investigation. I know that there are very strong feelings on both sides of this question, and any doubts about what happened on 9/11 should be finally resolved through a thorough investigation by people who have expertise in relevant areas.

I think people far into the future will be wondering why the truth seems not to have been pursued in a thoroughgoing fashion. One has to wonder, for instance, why WTC Building 7 would have collapsed in the manner it did. On the other hand, a lot of people feel that there's a lot of conspiracy theory going on. But as someone once said, "Paranoia is not necessarily a disease, but could be just a heightened state of awareness."

We really deserve answers, and our posterity deserves answers.

RB: You anticipated my next question with your reference to WTC 7, which is where Griffin, Richard Gage, and other architects and leaders of the 9/11 Truth movement have suggested we focus.

When most Americans hear about the third building going down that day in pretty much exactly the manner the first two buildings went down, they ask, "What third building?" The facts surrounding WTC 7's collapse start unraveling the official narrative rather quickly, because it defies logic. It's very similar to the magic bullet theory that casts doubt on the credibility of the JFK assassination report from the Warren Commission. It simply defies the laws of physics.

Then there is other evidence, including an article last year in a leading scientific journal discussing findings of ubiquitous nanothermite dust lying all over the WTC site at Ground Zero and the surrounding area, which seems to suggest that the fall of the WTC towers may have been caused by high-tech explosives.

Are these the kinds of unanswered questions you're talking about?

RA: Those are exactly the kinds of issues that ought to be explored comprehensively during an investigation.

I think that our nation was badly served by the Warren Commission following the assassination of President Kennedy. I think most of us feel that the truth really was never obtained or disclosed.

What happened on 9/11 was, in my opinion, far more significant in our nation's history. And as I said before, we all deserve the truth. No one should ever fear a thoroughgoing investigation in a matter like this, unless they have something to hide.

RB: If we take, as a premise, the unthinkable possibility that this was either a deliberate conspiracy involving certain members of the Bush administration, or more generously, that it was *allowed* to happen - because there was plenty of evidence suggesting there was going to be an attack on the towers, or at least an attack on the United States by al-Qaeda - as a pretext to hook Americans into supporting these illegal wars (as the administration promoting this pro-war narrative had recommended in their own policy papers years before), how, as a presidential candidate, can you dare to take on that kind of power?

RA: My view is that's the job of any national leader. That is, to pursue the truth on behalf of the American people. There are all sorts of signs that we are becoming more and more of a tyranny, more and more of an authoritarian government. Avoiding the thoroughgoing investigation to get to the truth behind 9/11 is simply another sign that our democracy is crumbling, and that our government is hiding the truth from the American people. I think it's absolutely incumbent upon our government to facilitate truth-finding and disclosure and allow *whatever* the truth is to finally be known.

Again, I don't prejudge this. I don't pretend to know. I don't understand the physics involved, or the chemistry. But it seems that there are enough serious questions that they ought to be explored, so that we finally attain the answers the people of this country are entitled to.

RB: Obtaining these answers, in itself, seems a Herculean task given what appears to be the stonewall against truth. For one example, my sense is that the American Autumn, known more broadly as Occupy Wall Street or the Occupy movement, has been really driven underground, chiefly through some very brutal police tactics. And behind the police, as we now know, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) appears to have been centrally involved in coordinating the penetration of the movement, the undermining and suppression of the movement, and the arming to the teeth of local law enforcement with military grade weaponry and equipment.

Along with the passage of the NDAA, and the proposed Enemy Expatriation Act (HR 3166 and S 1698) that, from what I've read, goes far beyond the NDAA in some ways - and many other initiatives that Congress seems to be pushing right now - this all seems geared to, if necessary, brutal suppression of the Occupy movement.

RA: I'm not sure it's limited to the Occupy movement, frankly. There are so many signs of our government becoming totalitarian and doing everything it can to quash dissent.

President Obama declared a State of Emergency which, under federal law, is to be reviewed by Congress every six months to determine if it should continue. Congress has completely violated that legal requirement, allowing this State of Emergency to continue without Congress's input.

There is a military unit now in control over North America, the United States Northern Command (NORTHCOM). This is the first time this has happened since the Posse Comitatus Act in the late 1800s. Under our nation's heritage, the military has never been authorized to provide policing responsibility domestically. And yet that's exactly what's happening, and was intended to happen, with the creation of NORTHCOM.

There is a continuity of government (COG) plan completely unknown to the American people and, apparently, several members of Congress. During the Iran-Contra hearings, Rep. Jack Brooks (D-Texas) tried to examine Oliver North about a continuity of government planning process in which North was involved. He asked in the hearings if North was involved with a group that was planning for a contingency to suspend the United States Constitution. And [now senator] Rep. Daniel Inouye, (D-Hawaii) chairman of the committee, would not allow Rep. Brooks to publicly pursue this line of questioning.

This is absolutely shocking, that a member of Congress, first of all, doesn't know about a COG plan that contemplates suspending the Constitution, and also that he can't even ask the question publicly. Combine all of that with the recent executive order by President Obama contemplating that the executive branch can take full control of US commerce for national security purposes, something in the steel seizure case that the US Supreme Court ruled was not within the power of the president, when President Truman tried to take over the steel mills.

Other elements of this trend involve recent legislation passed by Congress that provides criminal penalties for those who are within a certain distance of people protected by the Secret Service. I think that's clearly aimed against the Occupy movement, but also against anyone else rising up in dissent against what our government is doing.

And then, of course, President Obama assumed the power to target US citizens for assassination without any due process. And, most recently, the passage by Congress, and signing into law by the president of the United States, of the power to simply round up *anybody*, including US citizens, and hold them indefinitely - for up to the rest of their lives - without charges, trial, right of habeas corpus or even access to legal assistance. This is sounding more and more like the gulags in the former Soviet Union, or the practices of the Argentine government during the Dirty War, than the United States of America.

It's all very frightening. And I think it's all leading up to the crushing of American dissent by our federal government. It's an enormous betrayal of the American people and the values that the people of this country have held very dearly, and that have been fought for by those who engaged in military combat to preserve our freedoms over the years. Ultimately, I think it's treasonous that many of these fundamental values have been undermined in such shocking ways.

And it's all been accomplished in about a dozen years. It seems that there really are about no limits to what both the Republican and Democratic Parties are willing to do in the name of national security.

RB: My sense is that - as a country, as a nation - the vast majority of Americans are decent people, and would be shocked and stunned by this discussion. It seems also that our hope, in large part, depends on being able to get this kind of information out to the general American public and to help overcome the mass denial and ignorance, as well as the naive faith that our nation is truly heroic and guided by God.

How do we do that apart from the alternative news? How do we get this into the mainstream when there is no longer the Fair Use Doctrine, the FTC's longstanding policy that required news organizations present information fairly, in exchange for having commercial rights of access to our public airwaves?

It seems to me that, to preserve our democracy, we need an educated, informed public of individuals capable of thinking for themselves, which would lead them directly to these kinds of questions. How do we approach that challenge in this critical time?

RA: Citizen activists working at the grassroots have always played a vital role in getting the truth out to the American people. The distractions of entertainment and sports, and economic problems that people are facing in one form or another, have always been present. And we have often seen disinformation campaigns by our government. It wasn't that long ago that, under the Reagan administration, we were lied to almost daily about the situation in Central America, and the mainstream media dutifully went along with it.

The truth came out and was known by a huge number of Americans, if not most of them, about what was really going on in Central America, because of activists who were doing all they could to get out the truth. We had a solidarity movement in this country that, I think, was largely responsible for the Reagan administration's decision finally not to invade Nicaragua and overthrow the Sandinista government.

That's the power of grassroots action, and it's up to all of us to do everything we can, in every arena, to get the truth out to the American people. It has to be done in a responsible way, because if there is one exaggeration, if there is one misstatement of fact, it can undermine the entire effort to get out the truth, because if people can point to one erroneous statement of fact, the rest of the case can tumble in their views. So, I would urge caution, for instance, with regard to the 9/11 Truth movement. Certainly, there ought to be questions raised. But it can be very dangerous to speculate about certain matters and to say *that* is the truth, at least in terms of winning people over and exposing the truth about other matters.

One of the reasons that I'm running is because in a campaign like the one we're carrying on, it's a fantastic opportunity to raise these issues and get the truth out. And I'm working every single day - and night - to do that, and will continue to do that.

The situation now is a lot like the lobster in boiling water. This has all crept up over time, and unless something catastrophic happens right before our very eyes, and it's a sudden thing, we as the American public oftentimes don't pay very close attention.

We need to convey to people in this country what's happened, and get everyone to put it in the perspective of what's really gone on these past 12 years in this country. This is not a matter of opinion about whether the president has assumed dictatorial powers. It's a fact. And I think that it's so shocking to a lot of people - to realize that the United States government has been so utterly transformed - that they are not likely to believe it.

So, it needs to be a matter of common knowledge. And we need to address it with a level of concern and activism that matches the severity of the problem. This is indeed a crisis situation when it comes to American democracy and our fundamental constitutional values.

I must say that, in addition to constitutional values, it really goes to the heart of who we are as a people and our moral values. Are we going to continue being a nation that goes around kidnapping, disappearing, torturing, and in some instances even murdering people? Are we going to continue to be a nation that engages in aggressive wars to take over the resources of other nations and dictate to them how they are going to live their lives? Are we going to continue to be a nation that suppresses not only people in other parts of the world, but our own citizens, denying them any security in terms of rights of privacy and their own personal security?

It's amazing how, over just a few years, it seems that so many people in this country have not only become accustomed to, but accept the fact that our government can be listening in on our conversations or mining our email communications. The National Security Agency (NSA) is building a 1-million-square-foot facility - in Draper, Utah - to store the records of the communications that our intelligence community is gathering. And a lot of those

communications are those in which US citizens have engaged. That would have seemed absolutely impossible to the people of this country not long ago, from our very founding as a nation up until about the last decade.

So, the complacency and seeming acceptance by the American people of these kinds of abuses is perhaps the most frightening aspect of all of this. We know that people who are given power are often inclined to abuse that power. The really vital thing is that citizens take action to place a check on those abuses of power and make certain that our government takes the necessary action to deter those actions in the future.

We have a history of doing that in this country, up until the past decade. And now the responsibility falls on all of our shoulders to reverse this incredibly dangerous trend in the United States.

RB: You're reminding me of the anecdote in your speech yesterday about when Ben Franklin was asked, "Do we have a monarchy or a Republic?" And his response was, "Ma'am, a Republic ... if only we can keep it."

RA: We still have the tools in our country to resist tyranny. We're fortunate in that regard. We have the traditions of standing up against tyranny. We have traditions in this country of people striving to do better when we find out that our government has abused its power, either against We the People, or against others around the world.

With the Republican and Democratic Parties in control, they're acting in a sense as a cabal against the rest of us. We need - all of us - to understand how dangerous this is, what's at stake not only for us, but for the future of this nation. And we *must* organize and take action, both within and without the electoral system, if we are to protect and maintain a Republic as we've known it since the very founding of this country.

If we don't, we're going to see our freedoms undermined. We're going to see an evisceration of the right of privacy. We're going to see far less individual, familial and community security. We're going to see much greater hostility and hatred aimed at the United States from around the world. And we're going to see the creation of a national security state where the freedoms that too many of us have taken for granted are no longer available to the American people. It's going to have tragic results for our children and later generations, not only in this country but elsewhere around the world.

We have a window of opportunity now to take effective action to reverse this dangerous trend. But, it won't happen unless every single one of us does all that we can, and never sits back expecting that the job will be done by others.

Copyright, Truthout. May not be reprinted without [permission](#).



Ron Boyer

Ron Boyer is a new contributor to Truthout. During his career in government, Boyer managed major, special projects in workforce development and criminal justice policy reform. He successfully advocated for and helped implement Public Act 511 of 1988, Michigan's Community Corrections Act, a national model offering alternatives to incarceration for nonviolent offenders. In that capacity, he also served as a volunteer regional field coordinator for the National Institute of Corrections, US Department of Justice. Boyer was also a co-creator and project manager of the Mare Island Reemployment Center in Vallejo, California, a national model "one-stop-shop" for transitioning federal workers into civilian jobs following the base closure at Mare Island Naval Shipyard. Since leaving the public sector, he has become an award-winning poet, author and screenwriter.

Show Comments