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The Incredibly Shrinking America

By Jim Hightower

Corporate elites and their small-minded political servants are creating the Incredibly Shrinking America.

"We the people of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."

What a paragraph! This sparse, 52-word opening of our Constitution did not merely launch a fledgling nation--but a bold experiment in democratic idealism. The rest of the document consists of details, but this carefully considered Preamble set forth our nation's purpose. It declares to all the world that the BIG goal of America--its very reason for existing--is to create a society that embraces and fosters such egalitarian values as justice, tranquility, common effort, the welfare of all, and liberty.

As Benjamin Franklin put it at the time, "America's destiny is not power, but light." The light is our historic commitment to the common good, shared prosperity, and a government of, by, and for the People.

Whatever happened to that audacious reach, that grand vision, that proud progressive purpose? We know, of course, that our nation has never attained the fullness of this ideal, but over the decades, generation after generation has at least strived to get closer to it--and made impressive progress. But today, some 224 years after the penning of the Preamble, America's corporate-financial-political establishment is fleeing the light, insisting that it's no longer possible or even desirable to pursue those democratic ideals that make our country important--and make it work.

What's happened is that, from Wall Street to Washington, we have too many five-watt bulbs sitting in 100-watt sockets. As a result of their dimness, America's uniting and constructive ethic of "We're all in this together" and "Together we can" is being supplanted by a shriveled, dispiriting ethic that exalts plutocratic selfishness and scorns the public interest as intrusive, wasteful, ideologically impure, and morally ruinous. They're pushing us toward a forbidding Kochian jungle in which there is no "we"--money rules, everyone's on their own, and such matters as justice, general welfare, tranquility, and posterity are none of society's damned business.

I Love You For So Many Reasons

I love you for that certain smile that cheers me when I'm blue,
I love you for your tender kiss that warms me through and through.
I love you for your gentle hand, your understanding touch,
Your eyes that always seem to say, "I love you very much."
I love you for your faith in me, your sweet and patient ways,
And for the thoughtful things you do so often without praise.
I love you so for all these things and many others, too...
But most of all for what I am whenever I'm with you!

The History of Valentine's Day

— and its patron saint — is shrouded in mystery. But we do know that February has long been a month of romance. St. Valentine's Day, as we know it today, contains vestiges of both Christian and ancient Roman tradition. So, who was Saint Valentine and how did he become associated with this ancient rite? Today, the Catholic Church recognizes at least three different saints named Valentine or Valentinus, all of whom were martyred.

One legend contends that Valentine was a priest who served during the third century in Rome. When Emperor Claudius II decided that single men made better soldiers than those with wives and families, he outlawed marriage for young men — his crop of potential soldiers. Valentine, realizing the injustice of the decree, defied Claudius and continued to perform marriages for young lovers in secret. When Valentine's actions were discovered, Claudius ordered that he be put to death.

Other stories suggest that Valentine may have been killed for attempting to help Christians escape harsh Roman prisons where they were often beaten and tortured.

According to one legend, Valentine actually sent the first "valentine" greeting himself. While in prison, it is believed that Valentine fell in love with a young girl — who may have been his jailor's daughter — who visited him during his confinement. Before his death, it is alleged that he wrote her a letter, which he signed "From your Valentine," an expression that is still in use today. Although the truth behind the Valentine legends is murky, the stories certainly emphasize his appeal as a sympathetic, heroic, and, most importantly, romantic figure. and France.
<http://www.history.com/topics/valentines-day>

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The articles below were printed in the Wichita Eagle that appeared in the Letter to Editors page in the Thursday January 26th, 2012 edition.

Unions Help Society, Workers, Employers

Economist Arthur Laffer attacked labor unions and asserted that Kansas would be better off without them (Jan. 20 Eagle). I beg to differ. Unions benefit society, workers and employers. Here are some reasons why unions matter:

Workers join unions because they want to have a voice in the workplace regarding working conditions, workloads and ways to make work more effective while protecting worker safety.

Workers join unions because they want fair compensation and comprehensive benefits. This enables workers and their families to live with dignity.

Workers join unions because they want job security. Boeing's decision to leave Wichita reminds us that job security is not guaranteed. The company broke its word to the political leaders of our city and state and labor. But this makes the support of unions all the more important for Boeing workers who are being abandoned by their employer.

Workers join unions so that they can have the benefit of collective bargaining. Fair contracts mean that employers can count on their workforce and workers can count on their employers. When workplace problems arise, there are grievance procedures.

I am not saying that unions are perfect. I am saying that workers are human beings who care deeply about their families, their jobs and their community. They want to provide for their loved ones, have a voice in their place of employment and contribute to their community.

Rev. DAVID HANSEN

Executive director

Interfaith Worker Justice of Kansas

Thank Unions

Without unions we'd have no middle-class workers. We pay high taxes to support all of the entitlements people enjoy. Nothing is free. Someone has to pay for it.

Kansas is a right-to-work state. Without unions there would be fewer

jobs. For every aircraft worker who gets laid off, several others on the outside will lose their jobs, too.

Your sick leave, vacation, insurance, 40-hour workweek and safe workplace are thanks to the unions. They need to be thanked instead of put down.

JAN LOGAN

Home 'Made in America': Can It Work?

By DAVID MUIR and BEN FORER

In Bozeman, Mont., Anders Lewendal is hard at work building a home he hopes will be a blueprint for creating jobs in America.

Lewendal, an economist turned builder, is constructing a house made entirely from U.S.-made products. Everything from the nails, screws and bolts, to the steel, staples and bathtub is made in the United States.

"Every piece here is made in America," he said.

Lewendal is convinced that if every builder bought just 5 percent more U.S.-made materials, they would create 220,000 jobs. The Boston Consulting Group agrees, confirming that Lewendal's numbers add up.

In all, the U.S.-made house is being built with more than 120 products from more than 33 states. But builders do acknowledge that using American products can be more expensive.

A box of nails is \$5 more than those made in China and steel is \$146 more a bundle. Even though certain goods are more expensive, in total, the cost of the house is nearly identical, given that other U.S.-made products are cheaper. The all-American home, which is not yet finished, is running only 1 to 2 percent more than a foreign-sourced house.

While some items might be more expensive, the difference in quality is often noticeable. The nails produced by Maze Nails of Peru, Ill., are made using high-carbon steel and a double coat of zinc. The result is that they are stronger, rust proof and jam the nail gun less.

"We're one of the last makers of nails in this country," company president Roelif Loveland said.

About 90 percent of nails come from China and, Loveland said, if he

could double sales, he could add 25 more jobs.

Many other U.S. companies said the same thing. If Lewendal's idea catches on, they could hire, too. From Gorilla Tape of Cincinnati to a Sherwin-Williams plant in Georgia and a Moen plant in Pennsylvania, companies around the country say if builders bought more American products, it would put people back to work.

ABC News sent Lewendal's list to builders across the country and some responded immediately.

Contractor Tarek Saad said he started ordering Maze Nails, an architect in Miami said she'll start buying the U.S.-made items that are priced the same as the foreign ones, and Paul Minnis, a remodeler from Michigan, doubled Lewendal's request.

"If 5 percent will make a difference," he wrote, "I am going to try for 10 percent or more American-made products."

Home Completely 'Made in America' *Watch Video* <http://abcnews.go.com/Business/Economy/made-america-blueprint-creating-jobs/story?id=14719487>



U.S. Tops Developed World in Income Inequality

There's income inequality, and then there's the United States. New research shows that within the developed world, no nation has seen the income share of the top 1 percent grow faster over the past three decades than the United States.

To qualify for the elite status of 1 percent in annual income, an individual makes somewhere in the mid-\$300,000s per year.

Happy Valentine's Day Get Healthy Be Safe

OK this is your sister coming at you again from the safety committee. You can e-mail our Union Safety Representative Kevin Rogers about any safety concerns you may have in the work place. We need your feedback on how we can be safe at home and in the work place.

We made it through the holiday turkey, ham, cakes and pies. Some of us were off over a week between Christmas and New Years and if you were like me did absolutely nothing. Your heart said what about me. The third day I was off I started doing things around the house that got my heart rate up.



February is the month that we give to the heart association to help fight heart disease. We can do some things for ourselves to help our hearts by eating less fatty foods and getting lots of exercise.

Instead of parking as close as we can try parking farther away from the door because walking does help. With just a little bit of effort you can turn your house work into workout that will increase your heart rate.

If you have a special someone that you love a lot then show them how much by taking care of the most important mussel in your body the heart. Because should your heart give out on you; then that's it.

Yes, this month is show your special someone just how special they are. Valentine's Day can be stressful if you let it. This is a holiday that you don't want or need a lot of stress, because that can wear out the heart. Maybe you want to lose some weight which will help your heart. Try losing the weight a little at a time, too much to fast isn't good either.

So let's start taking better care of our bodies because we only go around this way once. Don't worry about things you have no control over, it won't do you or anybody any good.

So not just in February but all year long love your heart.

I love all of you Happy Valentine's Day from your Sister.
With all solidarity,

Linda Ligons

God is good all the time He is good

CWA Joins Move to Overturn "Citizens United" Ruling

(UCS) The Communications Workers of America (CWA) on Jan. 13 became the first union to join United For the People, a coalition of more than 60 organizations combating what CWA called "the anti-democratic corporate and special interest spending in our elections made possible by the Supreme Court's ruling in Citizens United."

The January 2011 ruling unleashed unlimited campaign spending and has given rise to dozens of "Super PACs"

funded by super-rich anonymous backers.

"Today, there are real restrictions on our ability to make our democracy work for all of us," CWA said.

"Corporate money in politics weakens our democracy and gives control to the 1 percent. The only way we can break through is with a broad movement of activists."

The movement to fix the Supreme Court's "dangerously flawed decision" is being supported by MoveOn.org and other advocacy groups, Demos and other think tanks, and a range of allies uniting to take action "to ensure that our democracy responds to the needs of the American people, not just the bottom lines of wealthy special interests," said CWA.

Marking the second anniversary of the Citizens United decision, the expanding network of organizations "united in opposition to unchecked corporate spending in our elections" is planning to coordinate a series of actions from grassroots gatherings to rallies at courthouses and corporate headquarters across the nation.

"For thousands of American citizens, elected officials and progressive organizations standing together to demand a constitutional amendment to reverse the effects of Citizens United, this is a 'movement moment,'" said CWA. "Now is the time to demand that the American people – and not wealthy special interests and corporations – hold the keys to our democracy."

AFL-CIO Launches New Ad Campaign

(UCS) The AFL-CIO launched a new advertising campaign Jan. 17 focused on how "Work Connects Us All."

"As work changes, we change with it," the ad says. "Work doesn't separate; it's what binds us together. I teach your kid, you fix my car, he builds my city, she keeps it safe...work connects us all."

The ad – airing in Austin, Texas, and Pittsburgh — features members of unions from virtually every industry, and is part of a broad campaign that AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Liz Shuler says aims to "fly above the tactics and controversies of the day" and connect with all American workers around the values associated with work.

The ad campaign will expand to Portland, OR and other cities in the coming months, at an initial cost of \$1.5 million, which will increase as more cities are targeted. This is the first such national ad campaign by the AFL-CIO since 1997; unions now represent 11.9 percent of all workers, and 6.9 percent of private sector employees.

The campaign looks to build on the expanding national awareness of the divide between the 99 percent and the economically privileged 1 percent sparked by the Occupy movement, and the recognition that the middle class is declining as some states have tried to take away the rights of working people, by pushing anti-union legislation.

Yes, We Can Bring Manufacturing Jobs Back Here

By John Talton Printed in the Seattle Times

There's no inevitability about Asia maintaining dominance. America until very recently dominated high-tech manufacturing jobs but allowed them to slip away because of purblind policies.

Related

Thanks to the reporting of The New York Times, most Americans are just waking up to the brutal realities of the offshoring of high-tech jobs to make Apple's iconic products, with Chinese workers doing this under serf like conditions.

"Employees work long hours, in some cases seven days a week, and live in crowded dorms. Some say they stand so long, that their legs swell until they have trouble walking.

"Underage workers have helped build Apple's products, and the company's suppliers have improperly disposed of hazardous waste and falsified records, according to company reports and advocacy groups that, within China, are often considered reliable, independent monitors.

"More troubling, the groups say, is some suppliers' disregard for workers' health. Two years ago, 137 workers at an Apple supplier in eastern China were injured after they were ordered to use a poisonous chemical to clean iPhone screens."

Apple is hardly alone. Most nominally American companies have sent their high-tech manufacturing overseas in recent years, further limiting the possibilities of economic mobility of hard-pressed Americans. Amazon's Kindle is also made at the suicide-plagued factories of Foxconn in China.

On my blog, I asked what Henry Ford would make of this. Although he later became a crank and was no friend of unions, Ford's breakthrough insight was to pay good wages to American workers in order for them to purchase his cars.

Other early-20th century leaders, such as National Cash Register's John Henry Patterson, instituted similar practices, eliminating American

sweatshops.

The late Apple CEO Steve Jobs chose to move us backward. And why not? Some \$400,000-per-employee generated by Apple is a sweet payoff for top executives and elite engineers and designers.

Yet many average Americans, facing stagnant or falling wages, have indulged in this gadget-fest on unsustainable debt. When the spending slows or stops in what remains the world's largest consumer market, Apple will feel the pain, too.

According to a new report by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, nearly one-quarter of Americans work in low-wage jobs, higher than other advanced nations.

One Apple exec said, "We don't have an obligation to solve America's problems."

This is particularly offensive, the epitome of corporation-as-sociopath.

Apple and its cohorts wouldn't exist without the taxpayer money that developed the Internet, paid for public-university graduates and government research and development, and polices the 10,000-mile-long supply chain with the U.S. Navy. They are insistent that the U.S. government protect their intellectual property.

Clyde Prestowitz, on his influential blog on Foreign Policy, recalled that when he was a top trade negotiator in the Reagan administration, "Steve Jobs and other Apple executives had the funny notion that the U.S. government had an obligation to help them, and asked me and other negotiators at the Commerce Department and the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative to help them get on the shelf in Japan."

Prestowitz makes the essential point that this manufacturing has not moved to China because of costs. Germany and Japan are both successful high-wage, high-cost export superpowers.

Rather, China has the neo-mercantilist policy of requiring U.S. companies to put factories there rather than having to buy our exports.

Other Asian countries have also engaged in "interventionist industrial policies": currency manipulation, tax breaks, subsidies and outright protec-

tionism.

Steve Jobs told President Obama that these manufacturing positions are not coming back, that the infrastructure now exists in Asia. This is hardly a reason to give up.

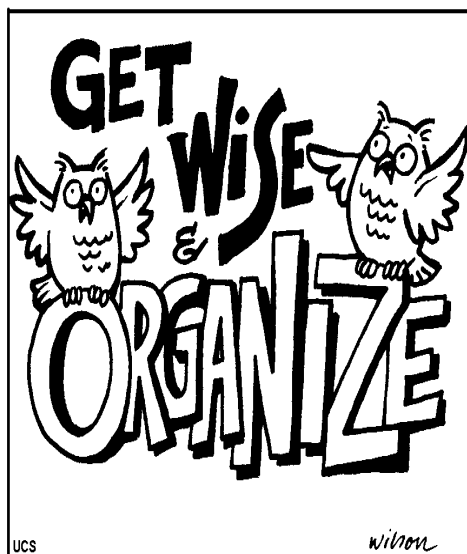
For one thing, Intel shows that some of this work can still be done profitably here. Our productivity and innovation remain strong.

There's no inevitability about Asia maintaining its edge. America until very recently dominated high-tech manufacturing jobs but allowed them to slip away because of purblind policies.

According to Prestowitz: "Asia got them because its governments and corporations worked hand in glove to get them. There is no reason why the United States government can't work hand in glove with corporations to get at least some of them back. It's not rocket science. Just imitate what the Asians (and Germans) do."

In his State of the Union address, Obama seemed to begin to understand this. The question now is how hard the American people will push to make this happen, or just settle for Wal-Mart jobs and national suicide.

<http://bit.ly/xAsGGB>



"The mindless junk of your past crowds out opportunities and sets pointless limitations.

Move out the junk, and you create room for the rest of your life.

Ultimately, it's not just a question of tidying your house; it's a question of liberating your heart."

-- Merlin Mann

Month	Joe Kneip		Sam Humble		Juice Bruner	
	Dec.	Jan.	Dec.	Jan.	Dec.	Jan.
Verbal	4	8	9	6	4	4
Step I	0	0	6	4	0	0
Step II	2	1	5	7	2	0
Step III	1	2	1	3	1	2
Arbitration	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total Active	7	11	21	20	7	7
Closed	2	3	8	13	0	0

SECOND & THIRD SHIFTS				
Month	Donovan Walker		Dave Dunnavent	
	Dec.	Jan.	Dec.	Jan.
Verbal	12	11	1	0
Step I	0	2	1	0
Step II	0	0	1	0
Step III	4	4	0	1
Arbitration	0	0	0	0
Total Active	16	17	3	1
Closed	3	4	0	2

TOTALS	
Dec.	Jan.
30	29
7	6
10	8
7	12
0	1
54	56
13	22

Poverty Underlies Education System's Shortcomings

Here's a letter to the editor in The Hill by Diann Woodard, president of the School Administrators (AFSA), the only national education union representing principals, assistant principals and school administrators.

The failure of our education system lies not within the walls of the public schools that serve children in crisis, but with the policymakers and policies in place that ignore the fundamental causes of low student achievement: unfair funding formulas, poverty and unproven education policies ("For America's children, education outlook grows only dimmer," Jan. 23, by Juan Williams).

Families are increasingly falling into poverty, experiencing a lack of housing and unable to provide adequate health care and nutrition for their chil-

dren. These children need increased services, yet often do not receive them because of budget cuts, bureaucratic hurdles and gross inequities in state and local funding formulas.

Public schools welcome these children, for our doors are open to all. We do not hand-select the brightest, the ones with involved parents, or the students who will make us look good on half-hour media specials. Their time at school might provide their only stable environment, and we provide it with only a fraction of resources afforded to more affluent districts and private schools.

No evidence exists that suggests closing schools is a good thing, and a recent study conducted by Julian Betts and Richard Atkinson concluded that there is little research to suggest that charter and private schools are better than public ones, and that the limited

data that are available are not enough to draw accurate conclusions about their long-term effectiveness.

Education makes up less than 3 percent of the federal budget. If a nation's priorities are reflected in its budget, then to invest so little in education demonstrates we don't understand or appreciate its value. We need an increased investment with a focus on quality, not just on quantity.

States and districts should be required to conduct a needs analysis and target resources accordingly. Principals need meaningful training, increased resources and support. All schools should be granted immediate relief from No Child Left Behind's flawed adequate yearly progress and in a reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act, schools that serve communities with the greatest needs and challenges should be given the greatest support.

{See Education on Page 6}

A Steep Problem

A CEO, manager and union shop steward were on their way to a meeting. They were driving down a steep mountain road when suddenly the brakes failed.

The car careened down the road, bouncing off the crash barriers, until it ground to a halt. Shaken but unhurt, the car's occupants now faced the problem of being stuck halfway down a mountain in a car with no brakes.

"I know," said the CEO confidently, "Let's have a meeting, propose a Vision, formulate a Mission Statement, define some Goals, and by a process of Continuous Improvement find a solution to the Critical Problems, and we can be on our way."

"With all due respect, sir," said the union shop steward, "That will take far too long, and besides, that method has never worked before. I've got my Swiss Army knife with me, and in no time at all I can strip down the car's braking system, isolate the fault, fix it, and we can be on our way."

"Excellent suggestion," agreed the manager, "But before we do anything too hasty I think we should push the car back up the road and see if it happens again."

Education

School children don't vote—perhaps that is why we have not yet seen a genuine, concerted effort by our elected officials to rebuild and strengthen our public education system.

Despite Attacks, U.S. Union Membership Rises

A new Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) report shows union membership increased in 2011, despite the year's historic onslaught of anti-union attacks from Republican politicians.

The BLS report shows union membership increased by 49,000 from 2010 to 2011. The private sector led the way with a union membership increase of 110,000 employees, while the public sector saw a 61,000 decline, mainly due to government cutbacks.

The overall unionization rate was essentially unchanged at 11.8 percent, a total of 14.8 million union workers.

The data also show that among full-time wage and salary workers, the median weekly earnings of union members were \$938, compared to \$729 for non-union workers. And, union women earned median weekly earnings of \$879, an amount 34.6 percent higher than their non-union counterparts, who earned just \$653 by comparison.

"Prior reporting shows that union members have greater access to health care, retirement and leave benefits," said Department of Labor Secretary Hilda Solis. "Today's numbers make it clear that union jobs are critical to a strong economy. And a strong economy depends on a strong and growing middle class.

"Ensuring that all people have a voice at work and protecting their right to organize and bargain collectively are essential for an America that's built to last, where everyone gets a fair shot, everyone pays his or her fair share and everyone plays by the same rules."

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