

To make America truly great put the Earth first

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What's wrong with this picture?

It's January 18, 2019 and I'm standing in front of a row of Canary Island Date Palms thriving outside in London, England. This winter has not yet recorded a freeze, as evidenced by an unscathed banana plant out of camera range. Globally, the last five years were the five warmest years on record, and the 18 warmest years occurred in the last 19 years. London is at 51.5 degrees north latitude—only 1,000 miles from the Arctic Circle. Because of global warming due to the burning of fossil fuels, various types of subtropical palms and plants as well as naturalized wild parrots, can now be seen in the UK. I'm smiling because I'm a Floridian who loves palms, but I'm not happy about climate change.

I'm in (surprisingly temperate) England attending President Finishing School, which the University of London insists on calling a "Masters degree in Global Politics." Even though I've had multiple careers spanning nearly half a century, going back to school has given me a valuable and timely perspective. Also, living in a dormitory and dining every day with students from all over the world has been an education in itself. Even first year "freshers" discuss the United States and international relations as if their lives depend on it. While they exhibit varying degrees of disdain or horror related to America's missteps in the past, as well as admiration for our culture and pervasive influence, the discussions both in and out of the classroom tell me how much our country still matters in the world. The near consensus is that we are losing prestige because—instead of being a model of equality, democracy, and enlightened foreign policy—the US is hypocritical at home while often being righteous, bullying, or capricious abroad.

To be great individually and collectively, requires honesty, self-awareness, compassion, and reason, and actions must reflect ideals. We should be number one in democracy, not ranked as a flawed democracy in 21st place. Nor should we be 16th on the Corruption Perceptions Index, 43rd in life expectancy, or 169th in income equality. Instead of being the best in what is best, we are number one in gun ownership and incarceration.

Greatness is also determined by how we meet global challenges. There are many threats being added to the historical dangers of famine, pestilence, war, and nuclear holocaust. Now we also have to face cyberwarfare, rogue biotechnology or nanotechnology, various forms of terrorism, environmental degradation, overpopulation, global warming, and hostile artificial intelligence.

What's good for the Earth is good for America for the simple reason we are all together on a rather small lonely planet, marginally protected from cosmic rays, ultraviolet radiation, geomagnetic storms, and the cold vacuum of space by a very thin layer of atmosphere. It's our duty as Americans to take our role in the world as seriously as we take our domestic politics. Putting the Earth first is patriotic because it is practical. The global liberal order is flawed, and under attack by oligarchical and authoritarian regimes seeking control. But there is no viable substitute except to implement social, economic, and democratic reforms that will unite and protect us from tyranny and injustice.

Twelve steps to greatness

1. **Democracy/Electoral Reform:** Eliminate private campaign financing because elections should not be auctions, nor should they be about attack ads or fear mongering. Our leaders need to focus on their jobs, not fundraising. We should replace our flawed, highly polarized, two-party, winner-take-all electoral system with Instant Runoff Voting in single member elections, and Proportional Representation in larger, newly-created, multi-member, congressional districts. This will end gerrymanders, spoilers, and disproportionate representation. Voting rights should be automatic and permanent. The Supreme Court should have staggered, 18-year terms.

2. **Universal Basic Income:** A citizen's benefit of \$1,000 per month for every adult would address racial, gender, social, and economic inequality while advancing society as a whole. Here's the evidence it will work, and here's how I would budget for it.
3. **Monetary Reform:** Under the current fractional reserve banking, private banks loan money into existence, and only keep about 10% of demand deposits in reserve. This contributes to the instability of the system, bank failures, and recessionary cycles. We could phase in full-reserve banking where money is spent into existence by the government for the benefit of the public. This would reduce private and public debt, minimize recessions, and help finance government programs.
4. **Universal Health Care** would reduce health and prescription drug costs by nearly half, cover everyone, and raise life expectancy.
5. **End the War on Drugs** (which is really a racist war on the poor) by legalizing, taxing, and regulating cannabis and non-addictive entheogens, while decriminalizing hard drugs. I spent years turning an inner-city drug slum into a viable mixed-use, mixed-race, mixed income neighborhood and, even with constant policing and a vigilant neighborhood watch, we *still* have drug dealers. Ending prohibition will change the lure-of-the-forbidden, gangsta culture that has spread far beyond 1.4 million, drug-dealing gang members. Legalization will also save money and lives, eliminate drug cartels, vastly reduce incarceration, and allow us to focus on treatment where there is abuse. Holistic, transformational campuses of services can help those who need treatment, or who would otherwise be living in prison or on the street.
6. **Overpopulation/Migration:** Mathematician Bertrand Russell once said of overpopulation that people would rather commit suicide than learn math. Developing countries add 220,000 people every day. More than 430,000 people migrate to the cities daily. Unless we act, Africa will quadruple in population (from 1 to 4 billion) and Asia will add a billion in this century. This is a major problem for everyone. While developed countries contribute more emissions per capita—something we must also address—the developing countries produce 63% of global emissions. Much of this is due to the off-sourcing of manufacturing, which has helped fueled Asia's economic rise even while contributing to climate change. Instead of unsustainable consumption habits, rich countries should help the poor raise their standard of living in a responsible manner, while also providing incentives to bring the world's human population into balance. European countries are able to have open borders among themselves because they reached Zero Population Growth (ZPG) and have a high quality of life. Only when all countries reach this level, without exceeding the Earth's carrying capacity, will immigration decline and borders no longer matter. Until then, migration and refugees from the developing world will be a politically and environmentally destabilizing phenomenon. An older population correlates to health, peace, and prosperity. For example, the median age in Niger is 15; Germany 47; Monaco, 53.
7. **Climate Change:** The latest IPCC climate report expects global carbon emissions to increase 2.7 percent in 2018. To prevent a catastrophe we must reduce emissions 100% by

2050. The US should do it by 2040. This can be done by switching to electric, mostly shared, fully-autonomous vehicles by 2030, and replacing nearly all fossil fuels with renewables.

8. **Guns:** Americans constitute only 4% of the world's population, but own 40% of the civilian firearms. Three percent of Americans have an average of 17 guns each, which constitutes half of the US total. These arsenals and easy access to guns mean more gun violence, but does not make us free or safe. Reasonable gun legislation should be determined democratically and not by special interests.
9. **Make Capitalism work for everyone:** Capitalism has been the most effective economic system ever devised for creating wealth because of competitive advantage, division of labor, and open markets. But without rule of law, transparency, free speech, environmental protections, democracy, and progressive taxation, capitalism creates oligarchies like ours, where the top 0.1% of Americans are now worth the same as the bottom 90%.
10. **Transportation:** Shared, connected, electric, autonomous vehicles used for public transport will reduce parking, congestion, emissions, and vehicles, while solving the “first and last mile problem” of traditional public transportation. New neighborhoods should use the New Pedestrianism model to increase bicycle and pedestrian use, and improve our quality of life.
11. **More carrot, less stick:** More diplomacy and foreign aid. Less for the military, but more for cybersecurity and AI, and to combat disinformation. Bad actors developing strong AI first could wreak havoc and imperil humanity. Our best defense against the dangerous use of new technology is for scientists, researchers, and journalists to join forces to constantly monitor new developments.
12. **Public policy wikis and answer engines** like my nascent LOGOS and UNICE will increasingly allow everyone to participate and contribute to governance, while distilling cogent and evidential public policy from our collective wisdom. Eventually LOGOS and UNICE will be able to interact with anyone in their own language and at their own level.

As these steps are refined, I would like to suggest we follow a golden rule of politics, which is to bring the greatest good to the greatest number, in the most efficient manner, to this and future generations. Achieving this means that our greatness will have to be shared. The choices we make in our dual role as Americans and global citizens will help determine our fate across the continuum from the universal to the personal.