

Far-right oligarchs thwarting action on climate

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Is there a link between this summer's historic extreme weather events and the political power of radical-right-wing billionaires and corporate plutocrats? Yes. And it will be nearly impossible to sufficiently minimize the former unless the latter is tightly constrained.

The record hurricanes, heat and widespread wildfires and smoke across the West should be proof enough for all levels of government to kick into emergency mode to cut carbon emissions and limit the climate crisis. But that won't happen, because a cadre of right-wing plutocrats and corporate kingpins, many of whom are tied to or influenced by white supremacy ideology, now control many levels of government and oppose climate action.

That is one of the most important takeaways from the new book "Democracy in Chains: A Deep History of the Radical Right's Stealth Plan for America" by Nancy MacLean. With meticulous research based on historical documents, it offers the deepest insight I've seen about how a small set of far-right billionaires and corporate heads are steadily turning our nation into an oligarchy. Their success puts all life on Earth at risk.

The book begins with a history of how a group of Southern white supremacists were angered by the U.S. Supreme Court's second *Brown vs. Board of Education* ruling in 1956 that required the end of segregation in public schools. They saw the decision in purely racial terms, and over decades they slowly built a network of national and state organizations that recruit and train elected officials in their ideology. Their efforts paid off.

Today, the ultra-right billionaires, and the officials they indoctrinated, control much of our economic and political systems. The frightening nature of this faction's radical agenda is difficult for most people to grasp. That's because we are

told that the political divide is between conservative and liberal, or Republican and Democratic, perspectives.

But MacLean points out that, as described in their own papers, these autocrats do not hold traditional conservative perspectives. They seek nothing less than to extinguish the ability of the American people to determine the direction of their nation. Their ultimate goal is to revert to the oligarchy that existed in the early 1900s, when economic and political powers were concentrated in the hands of a small number of white autocrats.

To achieve their ends, they push policies that allow corporations to seize public assets such as schools, prisons and Western forests. They also seek to privatize Social Security and Medicare, eliminate regulations that protect public health and the environment, starve the public sector and, of course, slash taxes on the super-rich.

MacLean found documents showing that the extremists have long known that the vast majority of Americans, including many Republicans, do not support their goals. The public's bipartisan opposition to repeal of the Affordable Care Act offers an example.

In pursuit of their goals they needed to deceive the public by using terms such as "liberty," "free markets" and "choice" that sound reasonable but which actually mean eliminating any restriction on the ability of the super-rich and corporations to do as they please.

They also decided to continually disseminate misinformation, such as falsehoods about the reality of human-induced climate disruption, and use overt or coded language to intentionally aggravate white racial anxiety. To prevent people who oppose their goals from voting, they gerrymander voting districts while falsely claiming voter fraud is widespread.

The Trump administration and Republican-controlled Congress are diligently pursuing these schemes. Just one more election could produce the super-majority needed to achieve their entire agenda.

The radical right's agenda also is alive here in Oregon. A number of current and former Oregon Republican state legislators, for instance, are associated with the American Legislative Exchange Council. This group allows corporate lobbyists to join state officials in selecting "model" laws covering a range of issues to introduce

in their legislatures. The policies typically boost corporate profits while restricting the public's right to healthy, safe and equitable conditions.

Most distressing is that by gutting climate laws and cutting science programs, the anti-democratic cabal seem willing to destroy the very basis of life — the Earth's climate — to prevent government, and the people it represents, from restricting their ability to accumulate unlimited wealth, political power and social control. MacLean closes her book with an urgent call for everyone to grasp what is afoot. We cannot prevent runaway climate disruption unless the systemic assault on our democracy by the far-right oligarchs is quashed. These challenges are intimately linked.

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