

“Why Do Large Corporations Get to Decide What *We the People* Eat?”

A Keynote Speech by Paul Cienfuegos

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“Healthy Eating in Context: Realities of the Dietary Guidelines”*

“Corporations decide how our food is grown and distributed, how we heat and light our homes, how we travel, what poisons we breathe and drink and eat. [Corporations] decide who works, doing what, how wealth is shared, what controversies get attention, what analyses and solutions are acceptable, who gets elected to public office, how this nation treats other nations.”

That’s a quote from Richard Grossman - co-founder of the Program on Corporations, Law and Democracy. He was my primary mentor in the 1990’s as I was beginning to be a leader in the movement to dismantle corporate rule in this country, a movement that has since come to be known as the Community Rights movement.

In my talk this morning, I’m going to be paying especially close attention to just a few phrases from that quote - specifically: “Corporations decide how our food is grown and distributed, ... what poisons we breathe and drink and eat, ... what analyses and solutions are acceptable.”

How did it come to pass that large business corporations get away with this? Was it always this way? And what can We the People do to end this awful situation? To answer those questions requires an American history lesson, so I’m going to take you on a fast moving roller coaster of a ride through 140 years of our nation’s history. In my weekend workshops, we spend four hours on this history, so hold on to your hats! (And by the way, it’ll make a lot more sense in a few minutes why I’m talking about early American history today at a symposium focusing on the USDA’s new Dietary Guidelines.)

The American Revolution was an anti-corporate-rule revolution. I make this claim because all of our original thirteen colonies were actually corporations - crown corporations - chartered by monarchs across the Atlantic Ocean. The early American colonists got sick and tired of having no legal rights here in the new world, so they revolted against the monarch’s corporations. After the American Revolution, the crown corporation that had once been known as the Delaware Company was legally transformed and became the state of Delaware. The Massachusetts Bay Company, chartered by a monarch, now became the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The Dutch West India Company became the State of New York. The Virginia Company of London became the state of Virginia. And so on.

After the American Revolutionary War was over, The American colonists were highly distrustful of the very concept of a business corporation, because of their very negative personal experiences as oppressed people living under the tyranny of the crown's chartered corporations. So they re-imagined, from scratch, what a business corporation would be. Investors would meet with a state legislature and try to convince them to grant the *privilege* of the state creating a new corporation. Each corporate charter included many requirements and prohibitions. If the newly founded corporation's directors significantly violated the rules in their charter - their defining document - the legislature would commonly dissolve the corporation, seize its assets, and sometimes even imprison its directors.

From the American Revolution until the 1880's, here were some of the rules:

- * corporations were prohibited from donating any money to influence the outcome of an election
- * corporations were prohibited from donating money or services to civic or charitable organizations
- * corporate directors and shareholders were held personally liable for all harms and debts
- * corporate financial records were considered public information.

I could go on. But you get the point.

I am certainly not claiming that our first century in the US was a very happy one for most people. It was a terrifying place for enslaved African people. Territorial expansion was wiping out millions of Indigenous peoples. Only white propertied men were recognized as having personhood under law. And yet ... something else politically remarkable was also taking place that would define the nation until the late 1800's: because business corporations were widely distrusted by our founding mothers and fathers, no one, even the most elite Americans, was in favor of corporations ever again gaining the political, economic, and legal power that they once had prior to the American Revolution, when they had ruled the thirteen colonies.

Yes, the 1% was running the country, but they were doing so in a way that kept the business corporation subordinated under law. If you had suggested that corporations should have constitutional "rights", you would have been laughed out of the room - not just by working class people but by judges and legislators. It is quite hard for most people today to believe this, but until the dawn of the 20th century, it was commonly understood that business corporations were our servants, they were chartered to serve the public good, and to cause no harm. My oh my how things have changed!

How did business corporations get transformed from their role as servants to their current role as our masters? That story is equally fascinating, and it can be summed up like this: The US Supreme Court started giving business corporations constitutional "rights" in 1819 – that's 197 years and counting. No elected legislature, no governor, no president has ever passed a law that granted constitutional "rights" to corporations. It was all done through the courts.

Americans are taught that we fought in a revolutionary war against a monarchy in order to create real democracy. And yet, here in the US, we have our own form of monarchy. It's hidden in plain sight. It's the Supreme Court. Think about it. Supreme Court judges serve for life, just like the king. They cannot be fired, just like the king. Their decisions cannot be appealed by any higher authority, just like the king. The only difference is - we have nine kings, not just one! And they call this democracy?!

By the late 1800's, pretty much all of the requirements and prohibitions that had so effectively defined and subordinated the corporation had been thrown out the window. Instead, the Supreme Court identified certain clauses in the Constitution - like the Commerce Clause and the Contracts Clause - and decided that those clauses should be interpreted in a whole new way - as if they had been written to also include rights for corporations. In 1886, the Court granted 'personhood' to corporations, and continues to expand their personhood "rights" to this present day. Corporations now exercise their First Amendment free

speech “rights” - which translates as their right to pour endless money into our elections, and to lobby government officials. Corporate free speech also includes the right to control what information appears on their food and product labels.

How important is nutrition labeling, lists of ingredients labeling, country of origin labeling, labels containing health warnings such as on cigarette packaging, food product labels containing notification of GMO ingredients, or milk products containing bovine growth hormones? Product labeling is now contested territory in this country, because We the People allow corporations to exercise a whole variety of Supreme Court granted constitutional “rights”. And those labels, it has been successfully argued by corporate lawyers, are First Amendment protected corporate free speech.

It is virtually impossible in this country today for concerned citizens to successfully mobilize to protect our air, our water, and our food, because when we try to do so, we bump directly into a whole variety of Supreme Court granted corporate constitutional “rights”. They’re everywhere - hidden in plain sight. So our efforts falter, we lose most of our battles, without ever really understanding why.

Here are some current examples of how corporate constitutional “rights” interfere in our efforts to ensure that all Americans have access to safe and healthy food:

* Last year, the Vermont state legislature passed a groundbreaking bill requiring that all foods containing GMO ingredients must be labeled if sold in the state of Vermont. The directors of Monsanto Corporation immediately began to try to crush Vermont’s new law. This very month, Monsanto is heavily lobbying lawmakers in D.C. to pass a bill that anti-GMO activists refer to as the “Deny Americans the Right-to-Know” (or DARK Act), which would prohibit Vermont from enacting their law, which is scheduled to go into effect on July 1st. It’s not yet clear whether Monsanto Corporation has the votes to get their law passed. But what most people don’t understand is that this corporation’s manipulation of our nation’s lawmaking process would never have taken place at all if it had no First Amendment free speech “rights”, which in this case translates into a right to donate vast sums of money and to lobby elected officials. In fact, it’s even worse than that. The only reason food safety activists are trying to pass GMO labeling laws instead of outright GMO bans (which is what they actually wanted to pass) is because a ban would violate the corporation’s constitutional “rights” - and we certainly can’t have that now, can we!

* Multinational corporations now own virtually all of the companies that produce and grow organic foods. More than half of all organic milk now comes from giant factory farms – much of it doesn’t even meet federal organic standards. 80% of organic soybeans sold in the US are now grown in China, a country with epidemic levels of fraud in its organics industry. All of this could have been prevented if corporations didn’t have constitutional “rights”.

* When salmonella outbreaks occur at corporate meat processing plants, the USDA is prohibited from ordering a product recall or even temporarily shutting down the plants, because that would violate the corporation’s constitutional “right” against unreasonable search and seizure.

* A few years ago, Monsanto and Bayer corporations created the “Pollinator Partnership”, which then sponsored National Pollinator Week and the North American Pollinator Protection Campaign. Monsanto’s GMO crops and Bayer’s neo-nicotinoid insecticides are considered the most likely causes of massive bee die-offs over the past few years, and yet most of the people who attend the Partnership’s global events or visit its website have no idea that the event is sponsored by the very companies that are killing the pollinators. Without constitutional “rights”, these two corporations would never have been allowed to form this front-group.

* And finally, a local story: Dairy Queen Corporation announced this week that they plan to open fifteen new restaurants in Columbia, South Carolina, beginning soon. Does the local city council have a say? No. How about the neighborhood associations, which might prefer to see locally-owned and operated businesses in those locations? Nope. How about the voters, who might prefer other uses for those properties? Nope. Dairy Queen is a corporate person, with property “rights”. *It* gets to decide what happens on its properties. As long as its properties are zoned for this use, no one can stop *it*. This is the system of law that exists all around us – entire urban landscapes dominated by corporate persons with property “rights”.

Now let's focus specifically on the USDA's new Dietary Guidelines, published in 2015, which is the theme of today's symposium. I'll begin by sharing with you a number of excerpts from an article written by Thomas Sherman of Georgetown University's Food Studies group, published on January 12, that describes what so often happens when the original body of scientists' advisory report is “pulverized, put through a corporate filter”, and is then finally published as “a hollow shell of its former self”. Here's the excerpt from that report:

“You could be forgiven if your reaction to its public release was a resigned shrug after reading or listening to my many respected colleagues practically foam at the mouth in despair and frustration at the extent to which the Scientific Report proposal for the guidelines has been watered down and politically filtered to such an extent that it obfuscates its purported role to provide practical and useful nutritional advice to families.

For example, Walter Willett and his colleagues of the Harvard School of Public Health offer this succinct assessment: ‘Clearly these guidelines bear the hoof prints of the Cattleman’s Association and the sticky fingerprints of Big Soda.’

More blunt still are the words of David L. Katz, MD, of Yale University in his piece entitled ‘2015 Dietary Guidelines: A Plate Full of Politics’. He says: ‘I won’t mince words: in my opinion, the 2015 Dietary Guidelines ... are a national embarrassment. They are a betrayal of the diligent work of nutrition scientists, and a willful sacrifice of public health on the altar of profit for well-organized special interests. This is a sad day for nutrition policy in America. It is a sad day for public health. It is a day of shame.’”

Continuing with the Georgetown University's Food Studies report:

“... The widespread frustration by nutrition and public health professionals is the realization of an opportunity lost, because the original Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee Scientific Report was so promising! It was an evidence-based, scientifically rich report that made recommendations that were refreshingly clear and devoid of conflicts of interest. Make no mistake, it is a wasted opportunity, but part of my surprisingly sanguine attitude is that I harbored little expectation that the Advisory Committee Scientific Report would not be pulverized, put through a corporate filter that replaces scientific evidence with market-speak, and reconstituted as the 2015 Dietary Guidelines for America, a hollow shell of its former self.

... My main complaint is one of clear corporate influence For items that the guidelines recommend we eat more of, the items listed are real foods: vegetables, fruits, grains, etc. For items the guidelines recommend we eat less of, the listed items are nutrients, rather than foods: sugar, saturated and trans fats, sodium. Instead of explicitly recommending that we consume less red and processed meat, fewer processed foods, and ... fewer sugar-sweetened sodas, the pattern highlights saturated fat, sodium and sugar. This disconnect is not accidental and represents a successful effort by the meat, food and beverage industries to confuse the issue. The average consumer has only a vague and incomplete

understanding of what saturated fat is, or where sodium can be found; thus, eating a fat-free cookie distracts from the added sugars, eating a trans fat-free frozen dinner distracts from the saturated fat.”

Thomas Sherman’s article goes on to acknowledge that the USDA Dietary Guidelines are “not all doom and gloom”. That in fact, some of the guidelines “represent true progress”, such as limiting sugar-sweetened foods and drinks, and emphasizing eating whole and real foods.

Turning to another critic of the new USDA report, Marion Nestle, professor of nutrition, food studies, and public health at New York University, says, “Let’s count the 2015 Guidelines as a win for the meat, sugary drink, processed, and junk food industries.” She goes on to say, “If the Guidelines really focused on dietary patterns, they wouldn’t pussyfoot. They would come right out and say, ‘Eat less meat, ... cut down on sugary drinks, ... and eat less processed and junk food.’”

Marion Nestle has other concerns as well. For example, she points out that: “The recommendation to limit cholesterol has been dropped, ... Could the dropping of the limit have anything to do with egg-industry funding of research on eggs, the largest source of dietary cholesterol, and blood cholesterol? The Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine has just filed a lawsuit on that very point,” she says.

Marion Nestle also points out that the USDA’s new Dietary Guidelines are under attack from a new and mysterious organization - the Nutrition Coalition - that describes its goals as “ensuring that national nutrition policy is based on rigorous science.” This is exactly the sort of mission statement that you might expect to hear from a corporate front group attempting to manipulate public perceptions about their member companies’ food products.

The Nutrition Coalition claims that it receives no industry funding, but several of its members have received funding from Kraft General Foods, the National Dairy Council, the Beef Checkoff, Dairy Research Institute, Egg Nutrition Center, the Dannon Institute, Global Dairy Platform, Hillshire Brands, Campbell Soup Company, and the National Pork Board. So I suppose their leaders subscribe to the George Orwell version of reality -War is peace, freedom is slavery, ignorance is strength, and donuts are part of a healthy diet! Or perhaps this is just the latest example of what Stephen Colbert refers to as “truthiness”.

The Nutrition Coalition is so distrustful of the science behind the USDA’s new guidelines that they have already successfully persuaded Washington lawmakers to insert language into the fiscal 2016 House agriculture spending bill to direct the National Academy of Medicine to conduct an independent review of the science that was used in the USDA’s Dietary Guidelines. Perhaps they know something we don’t? Perhaps they have their own operatives already placed in high-level positions at the National Academy of Medicine, just waiting for the chance to attack the USDA’s report.

The National Academy of Medicine is an independent organization of professionals from many diverse fields, and it advises governments in a whole variety of ways, but it’s also one of the many professional organizations that have been heavily infiltrated by corporate interests.

The USDA and the FDA are federal regulatory agencies. Who does our government put in charge of regulatory agencies? The experts of course, who just so happen to be the leaders of those industries! And who writes the regulatory law that is designed to regulate industry? The experts of course, who just so happen to be the leaders of those industries!

Case in point: the USDA’s leader is Tom Vilsack, who was once named “Governor of the Year” by the biotechnology industry. And the FDA’s just-confirmed new leader is Robert Califf – an insider with the

pharmaceutical industry. It's a commonly held belief that the various industrial sectors have seized control of the agencies that regulate them. For example, Marcia Angell, the former editor of The New England Journal of Medicine has been quoted as saying "The FDA has been captured by the industry it is supposed to regulate." Would you believe me if I told you that she's wrong? In fact, the corporations didn't have to capture these regulatory agencies. They actually helped to design them!

Regulatory law was developed in the late 1800's. The US Attorney General Richard Olney met privately with the leaders of the railroad corporations to create the nation's first regulatory agency, which he described as "a sort of barrier between the railroad corporations and the people." The public was to be pacified with laws that sounded tough but placed much discretion in the hands of regulators. This new system of law worked so well to shield the railroad industry from public outrage that over the decades that followed, every major industrial sector demanded its own regulatory agency.

Regulatory law is corporate turf. The agency directors are corporate. The regulations are written in consultation with the corporations. Regulatory agencies were never designed to serve We the People.

My colleague Jane Anne Morris loves to say that the primary purpose of environmental regulations is to regulate environmentalists, not to prevent harm to the environment. The primary purpose of labor regulations is to regulate uppity workers demanding their rights, not to protect worker health and safety. And she's absolutely right!

Regulatory law does have one other significant purpose: it normalizes harmful corporate activities. For the first American century, corporate harm was prohibited. Now it's legal, and regulated, which supposedly ensures that only a safe level of harm will be permitted, as defined by the so-called experts. The regulatory permit authorizes the corporation to cause harm, which is considered a constitutionally protected property right of a corporate person. Believe me, I'm not making this up!

I'd like to spend a few minutes imagining with you how very different things would be if corporations had no constitutional "rights" in our society. These are some of the changes that you might immediately have noticed relating to the USDA's new Dietary Guidelines, and corporate behavior in general:

- * The meat, food, and beverage industries would have had no involvement in reviewing or interfering with the work of the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee Scientific Report prior to it being reviewed and released to the public as the USDA's official new Dietary Guidelines.
- * The language used in the report would have been entirely science-based, not market-speak.
- * The scientific research necessary to produce the new Guidelines would have been carried out entirely by scientists who received no corporate funding, and all of their raw data would have been considered public property for anyone to review at any time, rather than proprietary information.
- * Corporations would have been prohibited from setting up front groups or associations designed to appear as public interest organizations in their marketing campaigns about the foods they grow and process.
- * Shadowy groups like the Nutrition Coalition would have been required to list all of their funding sources, and no funding by corporations or their front groups or trade associations would have been permitted. Nor would groups such as the Nutrition Coalition have been allowed to lobby or hold private meetings with government officials. Nor would they have been allowed to draft their own legislation, or

make donations of any kind to influence legislation. In fact, it's quite possible that the Nutrition Coalition would never have existed at all.

But what about the USDA and the FDA in terms of how they operate day to day?

* The USDA's and FDA's directors would be elected by the public, not appointed and unaccountable. And after their terms were up, those directors would be prohibited from *ever* serving as paid staff or directors for any corporation that could benefit from their work at the agency. Staff scientists and researchers would have all the legal job protection they needed to blow the whistle if anyone tried to interfere with their work. Neither agency would utilize any research that was led by or funded by corporations. And perhaps most importantly, rule-making by agencies would be required by law to be based primarily on the input provided by the public through public hearings and written submissions, and all of those submissions would be archived online for full public oversight. In short, these two agencies would be entirely unrecognizable by today's standards. And here I'm still assuming some things that shouldn't be assumed - such as - in a truly democratic society, would we even choose to have food and agriculture standards set at the federal level at all?

But let's leap even further out of the conceptual box that interferes in our ability to think critically, and into realms not colonized by corporate thinking. Here are some directions that communities might choose to go in their law-making efforts:

* All retail grocery stores over a certain square footage shall be required to reserve a certain percentage of their shelf space for foods grown or processed within 500 miles of the store.

* High fructose corn syrup and a whole list of other ingredients that are proven to be harmful to human health and the environment shall no longer be allowed in any food and drink products.

* Pesticides that are suspected of causing significant harm to people and nature, such as glycosphates, shall be prohibited in all agricultural uses.

* School lunch programs shall be required to purchase a certain percentage of their food from locally-owned farms and food processing companies, or grown by the students themselves as part of their scheduled learning; and all of their food must be free of pesticide residues, and as minimally processed as possible.

* Similar food programs shall be required throughout the prison system.

* Food growing and processing companies that are democratically self-managed by the workers themselves shall be given additional tax incentives to ensure their success in the marketplace.

Every single change I've just described could be achieved rather quickly if We the People shifted our collective focus to dismantling this ridiculous system of law that grants an ever growing collection of constitutional "rights" to corporations. Now you may think this is pie in the sky. But in fact, a movement has been growing across the US for the past sixteen years with exactly this laser focus. And this movement has a flip side too, which is all about simultaneously driving new rights into law that enshrine We the People's inherent right to govern ourselves. We call it rights-based lawmaking. I have been an educator and community organizer in this work now for 21 years - longer than any of my colleagues. Our work is grounded in much of the early US history that I've already shared with you. We refer to ourselves as the Community Rights movement, and almost all of the work happens locally, at least initially.

Since 1999, we have helped 200 communities in nine states to pass legally binding and locally enforceable laws that do three amazing things:

- * strip corporations of their so-called constitutional “rights” at the local level,
- * ban specific harmful corporate activities in that community, and
- * enshrine the right of a community to govern itself and to protect the health and welfare of its residents – human and otherwise.

Community Rights laws have been passed to ban fracking and oil drilling, water withdrawal for bottling, toxic sludge dumping on farmland, corporate-managed infrastructure, unsustainable energy development, and more. 95% of the 200 communities that have passed these laws have never been challenged in court.

My primary goal today as your keynote speaker is to help you to begin thinking about ways that your own activism around food and health issues can be strengthened by claiming your own community's authority to write and enforce your own laws at the local level - laws that are designed to actually defend your community's right to safe food and water for everyone, free of corporate interference!

You may not know this already, but you already have this right. How? Because We the People are the Sovereign. We have an inherent right to govern ourselves. This right is grounded in our own nation's revolutionary history. Small bits of this history can still be found peeking out at us if we know where to look. For example, the very first paragraph of the South Carolina State Constitution is one of those historical remnants - the words reach out to us in 2016 as powerfully as ever, from their origins in the American Revolution.

Article 1: Declaration of Rights

Section 1: Political Power in People

All political power is vested in and derived from the people only, therefore, they have the right at all times to modify their form of government.

It doesn't get any clearer than that.

And you can find similar language in the Preamble to the Constitution and in the Declaration of Independence.

A lot of political turmoil has taken place since the American Revolution. The elite, the 1%, has done everything in its power to convince We the People that we don't have that authority anymore. State governments claim the right to overrule and preempt local lawmaking that threatens state authority. Corporate leaders act as if The People are just in the way of progress.

So it's really no surprise that most Americans feel powerless and hopeless, isolated, angry and confused.

Which is why it's all the more remarkable to me that 200 communities in nine states have already risen up since 1999 and declared their inherent right to protect their own health and welfare, regardless of how many government or corporate leaders have told them they didn't have the authority to do that.

Three towns in New Hampshire have passed laws that prohibit corporations from engaging in unsustainable energy development. Two towns in Maine have banned corporate water bottling, and another town in Maine has prohibited corporations from engaging in unsustainable infrastructure projects. Dozens of towns in many states have banned corporate fracking. 20 townships in Pennsylvania have banned large corporations from engaging in farming or owning farmland.

On the west coast where I live, we got a much later start, but we're now on a roll. Spokane, Washington is attempting to pass a nationally groundbreaking Workers Bill of Rights. Two Oregon counties are attempting to ban corporations from planting genetically modified seeds. A third Oregon county is attempting to prohibit corporations from shipping oil and coal by train, or exporting it from local terminals. Mendocino County, California, will soon be attempting to pass their second Community Rights ordinance - this one would elect a Home Rule Charter Commission - with the goal of then passing - a year later - a truly revolutionary Community Rights-based local charter that would expansively redefine the scope of their authority as local communities. And finally, my Community Rights group in Portland, Oregon, will soon be launching a Neighborhood Bill of Rights campaign that would allow neighborhood majorities to prohibit major corporate developments from being built in their own neighborhoods.

As you can see, the Community Rights movement is alive and kicking. What do you think? Can you see the usefulness of this strategy, as you strive to come up with more effective ways to protect your small farmers, and to guarantee safe and healthy food for all who live here?

And if your communities move forward in setting up a Community Rights ordinance campaign, the question I encourage all of you to be asking is this one: What do you want to achieve? Not what do you think you can get. Not what are you allowed to do. Because you see, our branches of government are all legally required to serve you, to be accountable to you. They are all subordinate to you. They all have duties and responsibilities to you. Again, here's the first paragraph of your state constitution: "All political power is vested in and derived from the people only, therefore, they have the right at all times to modify their form of government."

I have taken the liberty of preparing four questions, with a specific focus on food and water, to help you to start this truly revolutionary conversation in your communities:

#1) What do your local, state and federal governments currently do that have a positive impact on food and water issues in your community, and you want them to continue doing those things?

#2) What do your local, state and federal governments currently do that have a negative impact on food and water in your community, and you want them to stop doing those things?

#3) What do your local, state and federal governments currently NOT do that you wish that they would start doing because those government activities would have a positive impact on food and water in your community?

And finally...

#4) What do your local, state and federal governments currently NOT do, and you're really glad, really happy, that they do NOT do these things, because your community's food and water are better off without that government interference?

These four questions will lead you to the next step in your journey of recalibrating your relationship with your government institutions.

You are also going to want to figure out how to frame the critical decisions facing your community about food and water in a way that Republicans and Democrats, Greens, Libertarians, and Independents can all agree on. In my experience, this isn't as hard as it might sound.

I am going to venture a guess that an overwhelming majority of local residents would agree that the rivers, streams, lakes, and groundwater need to be protected from contamination and overuse. I am also going to guess that an overwhelming majority of local residents would agree that every adult, every school child, every person in prison or nursing home should have access to safe and healthy food, regardless of their income.

And I'm going to venture one final guess - that the leaders of large agricultural corporations and food processing corporations are counting on exercising *their* corporate constitutional "right" to continue to poison your air and your water, to continue to grow food fertilized with petro-chemicals, to continue to raise millions of animals in prison cages, and to continue to sell all of this to you and your children in little plastic packages that immediately become toxic waste in your landfill. It's your rights vs corporate "rights". The choice is clear.

Down the road, if you take this path, you'll be ready to draft a Community Rights ordinance to be passed by your municipal or county elected officials. And if they refuse to pass it, that's all you need to know to toss that person out at the next election. Imagine how our communities would change, from the inside out, as more and more of us started to internalize the profound truth that "All political power is vested in and derived from the people only," and we have the right at all times to make whatever changes are necessary in how our government is organized to ensure that it serves us, that it's accountable to us.

Is what I am proposing to you a lot of work? Yes, it's a heckuva lot of work! But let's compare this with the current status quo, which doesn't seem to be working out so well. Every aspect of the planet's ecological health is heading off a cliff. Workers' rights continue to shrink. Our economy, based on the insane concept of endless growth, keeps lurching from boom to bust, growing ever more fragile by the day. Our nation is experiencing a diabetes epidemic, a cancer epidemic, an obesity epidemic. Our topsoil is disappearing at an alarming rate. Most of the planet's freshwater is now depleted or contaminated. It was inevitable that this would happen. This is what we get when we allow the elite, the 1%, to make all of these decisions for us.

Perhaps it's time to try something new – or more accurately something that was envisioned hundreds of years ago but never successfully implemented - We the People exercising our inherent right to govern ourselves. It's radical, in the same way that the American Revolution was radical.

I like to think that the Community Rights movement is blazing the trail that will ultimately launch the Second American Revolution. I invite you and your communities to join us. Thank you very much!