

Field Notes for transformation



“Together we are writing the story of our time as we reclaim the ideals of the common good and forge our way toward a new and truly just democracy.”

PATTI LYNN | EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

A vital part of the movement challenging corporate power

Dear friend,

Some of the most exciting conversations I have with members like you are the ones in which we think together about the world we are building.

Our conversations revolve around a world where every person—no matter where they are born, their race or gender, or their family's economic situation—has the opportunity to reach their full human potential. A world rooted in justice and equity, where respect, cooperation, and mutual care are the basis for our social interactions and institutions.

To bring such a world into being, we must see ourselves as actors and agents in a democracy that we can shape. We must believe in and empower transparent, equitable, and responsive democratic governments to help create significant change.

Systemic plans to destroy democracy

But here in the U.S., we are up against almost half a century of a systematized dismantling of our democracy. This has come, in part, in the form of the aggressive positioning of corporations and the private sector as best suited to provide services, manage our shared resources, and even solve social problems. And it has been assisted by the promotion of a pervasive worldview that denigrates the ideals of the common good and

dismisses the role of democratic institutions as protectors and advancers of the common good.

No wonder that for so many of us the world feels chaotic and threatening in this moment. Today's White House and its active dismantling of democracy and the protections people and the environment once had are no accident. Nor is the current administration the root of the problem. As celebrated author Nancy MacLean documents in “Democracy in Chains,” this is all the result of a decades-long plan to discredit and deconstruct governmental institutions in favor of unbridled markets.

The implementation of this plan has made a handful of people extremely wealthy and has given corporations enormous power. Deeply intertwined with structural racism, it explicitly targets the lives and well-being of Black people, Indigenous people, people of color, immigrants, women, LGBTQ people, people with disabilities, people with little to no money, and those at the intersections of these identities. And it has sought to take away people's sense of agency by positioning us as consumers first and as civic participants last.

Just a few examples: Flint's water crisis stemmed from the undemocratic emergency management

of the city, which ran the government like a business. Education is increasingly becoming a commodity sold to “consumers,” to the detriment of low-income families and families of color in particular. And industry-backed proponents of carbon market “solutions” insist we can tackle climate change as a market problem, thereby completely circumventing the need to address the root cause: extracting and burning fossil fuels.

The ground is shifting

But over the past few years, we have experienced a slow, steady shift. Organizers and scholars, artists and teachers, writers and workers—we are learning more about and exposing this decades-long, intentional dismantling of government.

Great thinkers and writers are exposing the deep roots and hidden agendas behind the ideology that advances corporate power. Nancy MacLean’s “Democracy in Chains,” for example, is a thoroughly researched exposé of how Charles Koch engineered what is essentially a corporate takeover of government. A recent report from the Roosevelt Institute describes, and suggests policies to address, the “one-two punch” that has entrenched corporate power and weakened what they term “public power.”

And as we organize with people around the U.S., we are seeing a new and increased readiness to take back that power. In fact, when MacLean recently visited our campaign headquarters, she told us she too sees encouraging signs. In her travels around the country, speaking with thousands of people and organizations, she sees how we are broadening our connections, working across differences and issues, and identifying entrenched corporate power and its underpinnings of systemic racism as roots of our broken systems.

For MacLean, this means that it’s not too late. She believes the story of our time will end not with the ultimate dismantling of our democratic institutions. Rather, she believes it will conclude with successful 11th-hour organizing to stymie Koch’s plans.

I believe this too. We are part of a growing movement organizing to ultimately advance our democracy.

Foundational transformation

For more than 40 years, Corporate Accountability, in partnership with allies and members like you, has been challenging unchecked corporate power and holding corporations accountable for the harms they cause.

And we are not simply interested in putting out fires; we are also determined to keep matches out of the hands of arsonists.

Which means we have always worked from a systemic perspective. We expose and challenge corporate power at the heart of our society’s deep and life-threatening injustices. We mobilize people to secure policies and safeguards—like the global tobacco treaty—that promote just and democratic governance and the common good. And we move people from thinking of themselves primarily as “consumers,” “customers,” or even “clients” of the systems and institutions we rely on to instead seeing themselves as actors and agents in a democracy that we can—and must—shape together.

Your partnership enables us to play a vital role in a growing movement to reclaim and fundamentally transform the democratic systems that have failed us. I am under no illusion that this will be an easy 11th-hour-save: We are up against tremendous power. And every day there are new challenges.

But I can feel the ground shifting. I feel tremendous energy of change all around us. And I see the vision we have articulated together—a world where we collectively care for each other and this planet that supports us—drawing into focus as we work with allies and members like you. Together we are writing the story of our time as we reclaim the ideals of the common good and forge our way toward a new and truly just democracy.

Onward,



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