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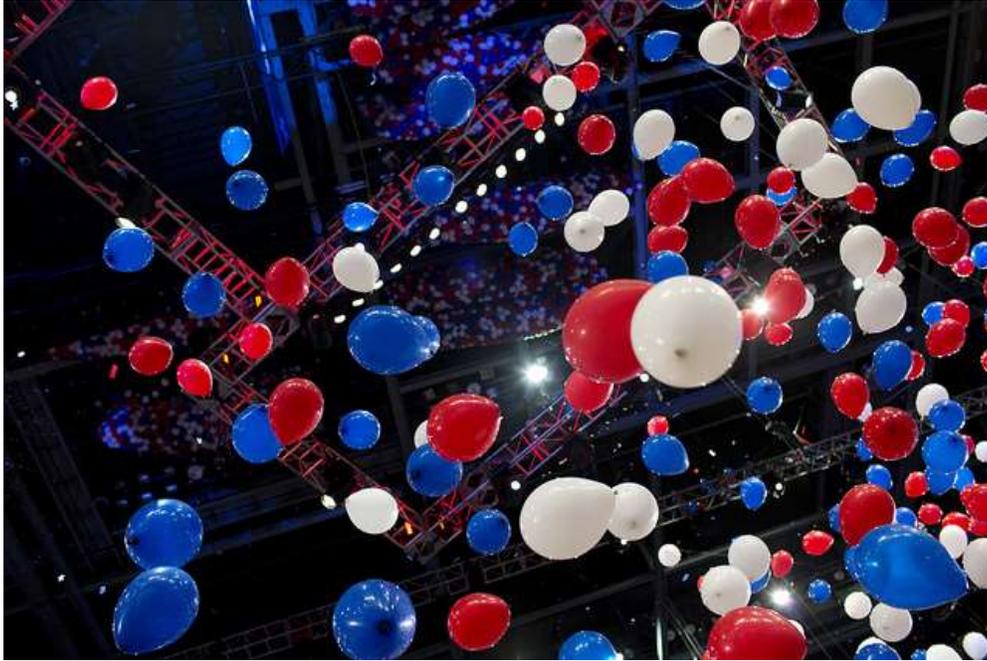


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## **More Good. More Honest. More Crazy: The speech you didn't hear at the U.S. political conventions**

**Nate Hagens**

The amount of interesting and scary stuff going on in the world right now is overwhelming. It's hard to make sense of what's really happening and what to do, especially when everyone you meet pretty much has a different take and different assumptions. This short essay is to highlight how different messages to different demographics are probably going to be necessary to affect positive change.

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There exists a physical reality underpinning our environment, our natural resource endowment, our stock market, our human economic system and the future health of global ecosystems. Discrete distributions and probabilities of physical situations at different spatial and temporal scales. None of us – not the world's most renowned systems ecologist, nor a billionaire hedge fund manager, nor a bus driver or golf caddy, know this physical reality (though I'd trust the ecologist to be closer than the others). Yet if we combine our modern media and the internet and myriad self-selected ingroups with our evolved tendency to be (very) confident in our own worldview, we are living through an era where everyone has strong opinions on just about everything. However, just under the surface of all this is a simple truth: ***none of us knows reality, but merely has a relationship with it.***

So our modern populace is replete with people having strong opinions about politics, about who is to blame for our social problems, about debt and the economy, about climate change, about foreign governments, about the lazy poor or greedy rich, about our broken healthcare system, you name it. These people, (including me I hasten to add), are guilty of motivated reasoning and a plethora of other cognitive biases reinforcing their own beliefs. So, given the myriad problems the world faces, do we need to convey the story of the human ecosystem in hundreds of different flavors in order to inspire and engage large numbers of individuals toward positive change? Or is there a 'one size fits all' message?

Below is a short speech I wrote on request of a friend during the U.S. Republican National convention. He asked me to parse our economic/ecological reality into a framework that could be accepted by the conservative half of the U.S. political body. I realized only so much of the 'truth' could be in such a speech, as the physical reality of 100 or 100,000 years from now is not even a whisper in the minds of someone whose brain is in fight-or-flight freeze mode. When we speak publicly not only do we have to reference the real world, but we have to anticipate the virtual world inside the heads of our audience. Facts are thus often inefficient distractions for large audiences. But speeches today devoid of facts and factual narratives, are just more bread and circus. And we can anticipate where that leads.

So below is an attempt to frame our situation to a conservative audience. One of many audiences that somehow need to engage on some part of our real challenges. I'm pretty sure parts of this speech would be considered crazy by some – but if so, perhaps the world needs more crazy. More Good, More Honest, More Crazy. Maybe that's a new platform ;-)

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## Speech to U.S. Republican National Convention Attendees

Greetings Conservatives, Americans and conservative Americans. Welcome to Cleveland!

There are many speakers here this week who will tell us what we want to hear, because it fires us up and makes us feel good. I'm going to give a different speech, one that lays out the context of our reality if we want to Make America Great Again. Suffice it to say we are no longer a shining beacon on the hill, to those in other countries or to other generations in our own.

America has been great before, but it was under a different era, different culture, and different physical backdrop. When our great Constitution was signed we had a little over 2 million citizens – now we have over 2 million people that work at the Post Office! And our population is 325 million. Though this is about 4% of the total global population, we use 25% of the oil, 50% of the toys and 50% of the medical prescriptions. We now have more bartenders and

waitresses than manufacturing employees. Most people are miserable and just hanging on. 50% of our citizens would be totally broke within three months if they lost their jobs. We have the highest prison population in the world. For the first time in our country's history parents expect their children will not have as good of lives as they did. I expect Mr. Trump will highlight some of these problems – the list of scary facts is pretty long so it could be a long night.

There will be those here that blame these things on President Obama, or the Muslims, or foreigners, or Wall St., bankers, or white cops, or black men. There will be those here who will shout that Hillary Clinton will make things worse and that a Republican is our only chance. I'm sure that next week at the DNC the people there will be blaming us for our nation's problems, and plead that a Democratic President is our only hope. They are wrong. Just like we are wrong. That's what humans do – when our circumstances are worse than the recent past, we look to put the blame on others. Sure there are some unsavory characters on Wall St., in the Democratic Party, and in Iran – but so too are there such types in our own Party and even in this building.

If you look closely at the demographics of Democrats and Republicans you discover a basic truth: we are all quite similar in caring about the things that matter – our children, safety of our neighborhoods, clean air to breathe and water to drink, and meaningful educations and vocations. Instead, we tend to focus on how we are different than the other Party and rally and get fired up about our superiority and better ideas. We are – pretty much all of us – angry, frustrated, and scared about the future, but deep down we are also able to work hard, sacrifice, help each other and be the good people that Americans can be. But in our blaming of others we miss the real reasons for our malaise, and thus are pursuing the wrong pathways if we are to 'make America great again'.

Let's be honest. The phrase 'the American dream' has seeped into our psyche. We are a special people – driven, ambitious, hardworking, creative, etc. But without occupying, and having access to, the most resource rich country in the world, our attributes alone would have attained less lofty outcomes. One barrel of oil, which we currently only have to pay \$50 for, contains the work potential of a strong American man working for 10 years. The United States has used more oil in the last ten years, the last fifty years, and since the dawn of time than any other nation. If we add natural gas and coal which have similar properties, 90% of the work done in our society is actually done by fossils – but these fossils are not unlimited and the easiest and best have long been found, pulled out and burned. The cost that our energy companies pay to extract these has been going up over 10% a year for almost two decades. One-third of oil production is now unconventional and is dependent on prices greater than \$80/barrel to make

a profit. In the period from 2005 to 2013, oil and gas investments increased by 60% yet the oil supply increased by only 6%.

We certainly have a lot of it left – but it's costlier, and since we use so much of it, this cost increase ripples through our societies and reduces wages, increases the cost of basic goods and makes our economy grow slower.

You might think that technology is more important than energy. Technology has given us some amazing things – but almost all of them need to be connected to an energy source. Most technology is just a means to grow our baseline energy needs. And without ample energy, the great technology just sits there. Without technology but with plenty of energy, well that puts us squarely back in the 19th century.

We have used the first half? The first two-thirds? Of America's energy endowment. Wind and solar are viable and mature technologies but a world run on renewable tech will look very different than today's world. Instead of the natural Conservative response to this situation being... well, 'conservation', we are eager to drill more holes and pull out every last hydrocarbon molecule hiding near the source rock, which is what we are doing with the shale oil and gas technology. We are feeding our faces with our seed corn resources, Republicans and Democrats alike, not worrying about being able to pay the bill, or what we will build the future with. Basically, the American Dream has been predicated on high quality, inexpensive natural resources, particularly fossil energy. Given the natural resource reality of the world –and our nation at present– we need to send some of the great thinkers in this room into a sweat lodge on a Vision Quest!

Finally, before I am booed off the stage, let me bring up what, as Conservatives, we should be caring about and shouting about and being active about way more than Hillary Clinton and the Democrats. Eleven score and seven years ago, our Constitution came into being. It was a fresh set of guidelines for a new country, full of open lands and resources, bright and independent spirits, and people yearning to be free. Our Constitution came much later than the Magna Carta, which came much later than the 10 Commandments, which came much much later than the Code of Hammurabi –the first known document dealing with rules and principles for humans to get along with other humans. Nowhere in any of these great historical documents is any language that protects the future, other species, other generations, or our common ecosystems.

At the dawn of the agricultural revolution, human beings, our pets and our livestock comprised less than one-tenth of 1% of terrestrial biomass. Now we are over 98%! We are losing animal

and insect species faster than any time of our planet's history. 40% of insects – gone in last 40 years. Since I've been alive, we now have 50% fewer wild animals than when I was born. What a terrible thing to state at a convention where we should be celebrating our values and our accomplishments. And these facts do not even factor in the impacts to oceans and ecosystems from the additional carbon we are putting in the air from the burning of our fossil wealth.

Most of our own people deny or downplay this is happening, because it requires difficult choices, bold thinking, sacrifice and creativity. Can we rally around those traits, or instead be led by fear, apathy and ignorance? For, my fellow Republicans and citizens of this great nation, that is what it comes down to. We face unprecedented challenges, to growth, to safety, to our environment, to our children and to our future. Instead of leading by example, sharing, caring, going the extra mile to help our neighbor, and tightening our belts, we have become complacent, surly, and occasionally violent. Expecting that if only the "other people" will change their ways that things will get back to the way they were. I have news for you my friends who are alive with me at this wondrous and perilous time. There's an intermediate step if we want to make America great again. We first have to Make America Good.

In five months Obama will no longer be President, something many of you have been waiting for, for a long time. But whether Mr. Trump or Mrs. Clinton wins, their job will primarily be to put out short term fires (and in the process create new longer term ones). Real change in the next four years will not come from a new president but from a new outlook, new ethic and new strength of our citizenry. We cannot see this clearly yet, our gut tells us this is so. Vote for whoever you want to in November. But then come home and be the change you want to see in your homes, in your cities, at your jobs and with your families. Games over gadgets, nature over neglect, Family over Facebook, conservation over consumption. Let's Make America Good.

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