

The Delray Democrat

How Can We Afford It!?¹

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“How Can We Afford It” is the constant, sickening drumbeat whenever Democrats pursue a progressive agenda designed to benefit most Americans. We’re hearing it again now, as Democrats release ambitious proposals to address both climate change and the shame that we are the only industrialized nation in which people die unnecessarily and prematurely because they cannot afford health insurance.

Depending upon their party, the same pundits who said Trump could never be elected are now either wringing their hands or salivating, confident that Democrats will turn victory into defeat in 2020 by pursuing a progressive agenda. “How Can We Afford to Do It?” these “Very Serious People” breathlessly and self-importantly warn.

Of course, they’re asking the wrong question. They should be asking “How Can We Afford Not to Do It?” Then the question answers itself.

It’s the question Democrats asked as they passed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act in 2009, saving the country from a Great Depression II. It’s the question they asked as they passed the Affordable Care Act in 2010, saving tens of thousands of Americans from untimely, preventable deaths. And in earlier generations, it’s the question LBJ asked before spearheading the passage of Medicare and Medicaid, the question that FDR asked before spearheading the passage of Social Security and Unemployment Insurance.

Ironically, no one asks “How Can We Afford It” when Republicans pass deficit-busting tax cuts designed to benefit plutocrats and multinational corporations. And no one asked it before George W. Bush launched a \$3-trillion war against a country that had not attacked us and posed no threat to us.

According to Ron Susskind’s book “*The One Percent Doctrine*,” Dick Cheney sought to justify the Iraq invasion by arguing that “if there was even a 1 percent chance of terrorists getting a weapon of mass destruction . . . the United States must now act as if it were a certainty.”

Today, by contrast, not 1% but roughly 97% of scientists believe that climate change is real, is caused by human activity, and represents an existential threat. Under the “Ninety-Seven Percent” doctrine, we must act as if climate change is a certainty.

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And if you have to ask how we can afford to do whatever it takes to prevent a future in which the planet becomes uninhabitable for most species and a hellish environment for those that survive, you're just asking the wrong question.