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*Getting the Money Out of Politics*

# Rocky Anderson: “Overthrow the Dictatorship of Money”

by STEVEN HIGGS

Rocky Anderson is always deferential to Occupy Wall Street when asked about the movement, most recently in a Jan. 31 interview with the online environmental magazine *Grist*. Occupy has been a “very healthy thing in this country,” and there’s an “enormous convergence” between its concerns and his. But for inspiration, the Justice Party candidate points to Tahrir Square, not Zucotti Park.

“One of the great inspirations for us was what we saw in much of the Arab world, where people were intent on overthrowing their nations’ dictators,” he told *Grist*’s special projects editor Greg Hanscom during a wide-ranging [Q&A](#). “... They put their lives on the line, utilizing democratized means of communication through social networking and engaging in classic grassroots organizing — and they succeeded.”

The same sort of populist, new-media-driven movement can succeed in this country, the former Democrat and Salt Lake City mayor said. The American people are disgusted with Congress, hold President Barack Obama in low regard and are ready for fundamental change. They understand that voting for Democrats and Republicans simply reaffirms a failed system and accomplishes little more than moving its players around.

“There really is a perfect storm in terms of the resonance that the idea of a major new political party has with the American people,” he said.

And, Anderson argued, it won’t require a billion dollars in special interest money to “overthrow the dictatorship of corrupt money in our government.” His [website](#) says he is fighting corruption by not accepting campaign donations of more than \$100.

“What the Justice Party and my campaign are about is to radically change that system so that we can eliminate the plutocracy — that is, government by the wealthy — and

ensure instead that our government finally represents the public interest," he said.

To get money out of politics, the first priority in an Anderson presidency would be passing a constitutional amendment overturning the Supreme Court's 2010 Citizens United ruling.

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Beyond the corrupting influence of money in governance, Anderson further burnished the antiwar, supergreen reputation he earned during two terms as mayor of Utah's capital city from 2000 to 2008. Ending the wars and taking the lead on climate change were next on his list.

"First and foremost, the wars," he said. "I would end them immediately. They have been devastating to this country and to the world. And they just feed into the corrupt military-industrial complex."

Obama, he noted, started and ended this year's State of the Union speech with a militaristic, cheerleading appeal, seemingly channeling George W. Bush. The president claimed that, through the tragic, wasteful and illegal war of aggression in Iraq, the U.S. is safer and more respected around the world.

"If the American people still buy that, after all the disclosures about the debacle of that war and the lies that led us into it, I really fear for this country," Anderson said.

As for combating the "most catastrophic consequences of the climate crisis," Obama had one "throwaway line" in the speech, which was one more than he had in the prior year's, he said.

While neither the Republican nor the Democratic parties have or will provide the "essential international leadership on climate change that's required," Anderson said he has spent more than a dozen years working on climate issues. He has spoken all over the world, received the World Leadership Forum's world leadership award and received the EPA's environmental protection award.

"I reduced greenhouse gas emissions by 31 percent in three years in city operations when I was mayor, then took our successes and worked to communicate best practices and provide inspiration to mayors not only throughout United States, but many other countries," he said. "I co-founded, with Robert Redford, the Sundance Summit."

For three years, the summit brought together dozens of mayors to learn about climate change, energy policy and the role that cities have in addressing those issues, he said.

But the impact mayors and municipalities can have is limited, Anderson said. Their role in raising public awareness of climate change is vital. And they can adopt policies that save money, demonstrate they are good for everybody and help change national policies.

"We don't have any time to lose," he said. "It's absolutely vital that we have far more aggressive and honest leadership on the federal level, because for the long term, there is no more important issue for the United States and the international community to be addressing right now."

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Anderson said he wasn't impressed with the rest of Obama's speech or his presidency. He was especially irked by his talk about the kind of country everyone wants, where everybody plays by the same set of rules.

"We have a two-tiered system of justice under this president and his predecessor that is unprecedented," he said.

Obama, Anderson said, has raised more money from Wall Street than any other candidate in history and hasn't prosecuted a single person for the financial fraud that helped lead to the economic meltdown, from which "these criminals" still benefit.

"That's a very good return on investment for these Wall Street bankers," he said.

On jobs, Obama's speech and job performance have been pathetic, Anderson said. Getting done everything he says he wants to do wouldn't come close to meeting the needs of the nation's working people.

"How does he, with a straight face, talk about getting jobs back to the U.S. without even mentioning free trade agreements and the need to significantly renegotiate those agreements to put them in better balance in terms of worker rights and environmental protections?" he asked.

The answers don't even have to be creative, Anderson said. Obama can hearken back to Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Civilian Conservation Corps and Works Progress Administration programs. He could put people to work rebuilding the nation's

infrastructure – bringing every one of its buildings over 30 years old up to LEED certified standards, for example.

“He’d be hiring hundreds of thousands of people, putting them to work, reducing energy usage and ending up with a far improved federal infrastructure,” he said.

As president, Obama should make the case to the American people the way FDR did on Social Security.

“FDR went out and fought for Social Security because it was the right thing to do,” he said. “He didn’t throw it out there and let Congress fight over the little pieces and end up with this horrific compromise.”

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Real leadership, Anderson told *Grist*, is bringing the American people along to a vision of what is right. It’s not following the polls. “It’s about standing up for what is right and making your case for it and getting the job done.”

And that is something Obama has utterly failed to do, he said. “He ran a great campaign. He was in a wonderful position with the support of this country for real change. And he has absolutely blown it.”

Anderson’s recommended course of action is for the American people to stand up and say they won’t take it any more. Regardless of their political affiliations, citizens should be join together and insist on certain fundamentals.

“None of those will be met by either the Republican or the Democratic party because they helped create the system, and they thrive from the corruption in the system,” he said.

Obama, for example, didn’t just wake up one day and decide it would be a great public policy decision to veto the EPA’s efforts to reduce ozone emissions, Anderson said.

“There’s only one reason he did that, and it’s the corrupting interests of those polluting industries,” he said. “It’s the same thing with climate change. We’re never going to see the kinds of fundamental changes that need to be made to reverse the tide toward catastrophic climate disruption unless we change our system. And to do that we need to get beyond this Republican and Democratic duopoly.”

Anderson’s prescription starts with the grassroots in 2012.

"The best thing we can do is essentially occupy the elections," he said.

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Hanscom is the former editor of the award-winning *High County News* and Baltimore-based city mag *Urbanite*. Anderson, he wrote, is no stranger to him or *Grist*.

"When we last spoke with Rocky Anderson," the interview's introduction begins, "he was kicking some serious butt for the planet from his position as the supergreen mayor of Salt Lake City, Utah. Anderson, an unflinching champion of issues ranging from climate action to gay marriage, quit politics in 2008 after two terms in office."

Anderson's presidential bid is backed by a tiny, mostly volunteer staff, Hanscom reported, noting that his Facebook followers reportedly came up with the Justice Party name. Anderson said the campaign, which has upgraded the voterocky.org website and has not focused on fundraising as yet. He estimated the campaign has received \$10,000 to \$12,000 so far.

"But Rocky is fierce and determined," Hanscom wrote. "And he's pissed about what short shrift American workers and the environment keep getting while the political elite and Wall Street fat cats get ever fatter. Given the outrage we've seen in the Occupy movement in recent months, his message is bound to strike a chord."

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