

Things you can do right now to support democracy, strengthen community ties, and keep yourself healthy—a starter list.

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1. Introduction—Recognizing and Countering Abusive Leadership

By now, we should believe any promises made by Donald Trump and Elon Musk to cause pain. The sheer scope and carelessness of their sweeping changes are almost unbelievable, and the excessive and prolonged stress and uncertainty is taking a heavy toll.

A chaotic administration bent on traumatizing the half of the country that it perceives as enemies has us all worrying, what disasters are next? You might be wondering if you can endure next week, let alone four years of this. A quote by President Obama gives me comfort: “The most important job in this country is being a citizen.” Another good quote is from the poem *Dover Beach*: “Let us be true to one another.” The trick is not to permanently pull away and ignore it all—go ahead and do that when you need a rest, but please come back. Stay informed, *not* overwhelmed.

A third source of help comes from the ability to recognize patterns of mental and emotional abuse for what they are. The effect of this shock-and-awe blitzkrieg and the type of trauma it’s causing is by design. It is mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually draining not only the groups and individuals who are being targeted, but the American people as a whole. For example, when the wealthiest men on the planet damage veteran’s benefits and destroy farmer’s and fisher’s incomes while saying only ‘bear with me, there will be pain,’ it’s condescending nonsense.

And for the White House to release a video of chained deportees that emphasizes cruel visuals and the sounds of rattling chains, and then publicly call it an ASMR relaxation tape intended to give viewers a pleasant tingling feeling—well, that’s sadism. To propose funding tax cuts for billionaires by firing and demonizing federal workers, cutting vital services, and calling people who depend on these programs “parasites” indicates that cruelty is not just their point, it’s their pleasure.

Mental and emotional abuse share common qualities. If you look up the characteristics of domestic mental and emotional abuse, they align with what's happening nationally. These include humiliation in the form of name-calling, derogatory pet names, character assassination, yelling, patronizing, dismissiveness, sarcasm, insults, and put-downs. Also control and shame in the form of threats, unilateral decision-making, lecturing, outbursts, and unpredictability. Abusive relationships also include accusations and blaming, goading, use of 'alternative facts,' trivializing, demanding but not earning respect, dehumanizing you, turning on you or turning others against you, and indifference.

It's normal to feel overwhelmed as we watch the cruel "flood the zone" tactics trigger peoples' coping mechanisms, such as emotionally shutting down, or avoiding the subject. This can translate into apathy, but detaching can be a self-preservation tactic so long as it's temporary. If it persists, though, it could create a state of despair and learned helplessness where, instead of rejecting Trump and his future strongman successors, many Americans could end up actually longing and voting for the stability and easy solutions these people always promise but never deliver. Even JD Vance called Trump "an opioid for the masses" back in 2016.

Here's a good [discussion](#) by the Mayo Clinic on emotional exhaustion. And here are [5 more tips](#) on how to deal with it, along with [7 practical skills](#). If you're exhausted but can recognize that this is indeed abuse, and then, if you can selectively engage as much as your own strengths permit, even a little bit can help, especially if everyone does it. But remember: we should not greet would-be dictators and their enablers with meekness and exhausted overwhelm, we should greet them with public fury and a loud, echoing NO.

Despite the damage being done, there are signs of growing resistance, and on the positive side, we have a strong belief in the rule of law and the Constitution. Amending it so Trump could serve a third term would be very difficult—three quarters of the 50 states, meaning 38 out of 50, would have to approve it. Also, DEI isn't going away forever, because multiculturalism isn't, either, especially given our population demographics.

So, the sooner we understand that what Trump and company are doing is a form of mental abuse whose purpose is to demoralize, distract and disorient us to a point where we don't resist the power grab, the better we will be able to cope with it and actively resist it. Understanding it in an abuse context will help us remember that

we don't have to be victims, because we are American citizens with an awful lot of collective power, not to mention the highest voter turnout in the state (87%).

Among the strongest and best things you can do besides speaking out and voting in every election is to get involved in local organizations that strengthen community ties, especially those groups who can take direct political action. It's also vital to reach out to people who aren't like you, because history has shown us over and over again that only *coalitions* of people who are willing to make some compromises in pursuit of common goals like democracy, have ever been able to defeat authoritarianism and fascism.



2. Local/Regional Organizations by Category

(This is just a sample; for a more complete list of local nonprofits compiled by the Jefferson Community Foundation, click [here](#).)

SPEAK OUT:

First, think about what you will say and how you will say it. Read [Six Steps to Speak Up](#) to get ready. Next, read Congressman [Jerry Nadler's statement](#) on how to refuse to normalize Trump's behavior.

[Indivisible Port Townsend](#) writes thousands of postcards, holds marches and protests, gets people organized, and they [get noticed](#). Learn about online sources for taking action and understanding actions taken, on the national website for [Indivisible.org](#) Download their "[Practical Guide to Democracy on the Brink](#)." Also "[A Practical Guide to Defeating MAGA](#)."

[An app called 5 Calls](#) is one of the "easiest and most effective ways for U.S. constituents to make a political impact." You download the app, pick one of 43 issues it explains, find the passage suggesting what you can say, dial the call to your member of Congress from the number provided, and speak your piece. It has helped with more than 7 million calls so far.

VOTE WITH YOUR WALLET:

[Goods Unite Us](#) provides quantitative research on political activities/contributions by hundreds of businesses and brands. It uses apps, handbooks, and links to other economic research projects to educate people on how to spend money in ways that do not support legislators who would harm us. [Do timed business boycotts work?](#) They do if enough media is generated; the damage from short-term boycotts is often more reputational than financial.

POLITICAL ACTION:

Washington State's [Fix Democracy First](#) has many allied organizations and works on the following issues: campaign finance reform, public funding of elections, ranked choice voting, reversing Citizens United, expanding voting access, and increasing civic participation. Here's a [list of allied organizations](#) who work to achieve fair elections and government policies, along with other resources.

[Puget Sound Advocates for Retirement Action](#) (PSARA). Their 2025 legislative agenda includes healthcare, housing and homelessness, worker's rights and economic justice, climate and environmental justice, and fiscal reform and revenue. They emphasize [opposition to privatizing Medicare](#) and have an active schedule that includes popular speakers like [Bill McKibben](#).

[Fuse Washington](#). Washington's largest progressive organization, they fight to give ordinary people a strong voice for progressive change in politics, from educating voters to leaning on lawmakers to support the best bills. And they list dozens of [allied organizations](#), both regional and national.

INDIVIDUAL ACTION:

“[Thirty lonely but beautiful actions you can take right now](#)” which probably won't magically catalyze a mass movement against Trump but that are still wildly important. Why? Because others will see you do them, and it will make it easier for them to take their own (slightly less lonely but equally beautiful) action by your side. (A Substack post by writer Garrett Bucks, with thirty suggestions.)

Read books! Here are just a few:

Stephen Martin Kohn's *Rules for Whistleblowers: A Handbook for Doing What's Right*, published in 2023, is being called “the definitive bible for whistleblowers.

Timothy Snyder's brief *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century* is full of things you can do that will help you recognize and counteract totalitarianism.

Nobel laureate Czeslaw Milosz's 1951 classic, *The Captive Mind*, reveals the beguiling allure of totalitarianism and its frightening effects on the minds of people who embrace it.

Hannah Arendt's famous *On Lying and Politics* is a perennial eye-opener from in 1954.

Another Nobel laureate, Elias Canetti, wrote *Crowds and Power*, examining human history and psychology, "dissolving politics into pathology."

Two companion books: Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*, written 1200 years ago and still taught at war colleges, gives insights on "shock and awe" tactics, and Philip Dunn's *The Art of Peace: Balance Over Conflict in Sun Tzu's The Art of War* provides insights on both the aggressive meanings of the original, and its more peaceful, balance-over-conflict meanings.

CLIMATE RESILIENCE AND SUSTAINABILITY:

[Local 20/20](#) is an all-volunteer, grassroots East Jefferson County nonprofit dedicated to promoting community-interconnectedness, sustainability, resilience and more. It has partnered with the City of Port Townsend Climate Action Committee to track progress on reducing emissions. Investigate the action groups under the Local 20/20 banner; [go here](#) for how to get involved.

The Climate Action Committee is a joint [City](#) - [County](#) group focused on building a process for adapting to climate change. It meets every other month on the second Tuesday from 3:00-5:00 p.m., hosted by Jefferson County. The goal is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 80 percent by 2050.

Jefferson County is creating a new Climate Element in its Comprehensive Plan. Consider getting involved in [Climate Resilience Planning](#). They frequently ask for input on their comprehensive planning process.

[Climate Action for Tired People](#). “Do you want to ‘do something about climate change’ but not know where to start, or where the time and energy to start would come from?” A toolkit and quiz for parents and others.

LAND CONSERVATION/PRESERVATION:

The [Jefferson Land Trust](#), a private, community-driven nonprofit in Jefferson County, preserves open space, working lands, and habitat.

Get involved with the [Friends of Dungeness National Wildlife Refuge](#), or the [Friends of Olympic National Park](#).

[Washington State Parks Foundation](#) offers many ways to enjoy and support our state parks.

IMMIGRANT RIGHTS:

[Jefferson County Immigrant Rights Advocates](#) offers legal aid, funding, and resources for food, housing, and medical help.

CHARITABLE GIVING:

The [Jefferson Community Foundation](#) does not engage in direct political action, but can help you navigate charitable giving and perhaps help you decide where to volunteer on behalf of the community. With the hundreds of nonprofits in Jefferson County, JCF’s resources can help you make these decisions.

United Good Neighbors of Jefferson County supports [29 local nonprofit organizations](#) dedicated to strengthening our community.

[OlyCAP](#), serving Clallam and Jefferson Counties, has been in existence since 1966 and has more than 160 volunteers focused on alleviating poor health, hunger, high unemployment, and homelessness.

HOUSING:

[Housing Solutions Network](#). A grassroots East Jefferson County citizen effort to increase the availability of local affordable and attainable housing. They recently conducted and published a [survey](#) on housing needs in Jefferson County.

[Habitat for Humanity of East Jefferson County](#). A global nonprofit. From 1998 through January 2021 the branch in East Jefferson County built 51 homes, recycled 7, and completed 32 repair projects.

[Olympic Housing Trust](#). “We provide permanently affordable housing to communities on the north Olympic Peninsula”

For a list of more local housing nonprofits, click [here](#).

FOOD SECURITY:

[Jefferson County Foodbank Association](#). Volunteer organization dedicated to alleviating food insecurity by providing nutritious meals and support to individuals and families in need.

Washington State University offers 6-week “[Growing Groceries](#)” classes as well as “[Master Gardener](#)” training.

For more local organizations focused on food security, click [here](#).

HEALTH AND WELLNESS:

For a list of the many varied community health and wellness nonprofits, click [here](#).

SPECIAL EVENTS:

Each year, usually in March, the Jefferson County Connectivity Fair is held at Chimacum High School, but this year it was the wildly popular [Connectivity Summit](#), with [130 regional nonprofit organizations](#) offering hundreds of ways to strengthen community ties and take action. The March 7-9 Summit was organized by a [combined partnership](#) between [The Production Alliance](#), the [Connectivity Project](#), and the Job and Trades Fair. The Production Alliance produces a season of community celebrations and helps nonprofits elevate their events. The

Connectivity Project has a [film series](#) you can watch online, with stories of the ripple effects of our actions, large and small. It's designed to inspire people of all walks and ages to participate in making a difference in the world. The Job and Trades Fair is an event where multiple employers from various trade industries, like construction, plumbing, electrician, carpentry, etc., gather in one place to meet potential employees looking for jobs within those skilled trades.

3. Staying Informed

Whatever news sources you use, try to read across an ideological spectrum so that you can detect inherent biases and see how an important story plays from various viewpoints. This is especially important when stories are controversial. You want to be able to recognize and discard sensationalism and disinformation. It can also help you understand why people take opposite viewpoints. News aggregators such as Apple or Google News are pretty good at offering multiple articles on the same topic across a spectrum. And if you click on stories from across that spectrum of opinion, the algorithm will get confused and won't feed you only the stories it thinks you want to read. It's richly satisfying to confuse an algorithm.

To find out how reliable or biased a news source is, you can check a chart compiled by the [League of Women Voters](#), or the original, interactive [Ad Fontes Media Bias Chart](#). You can also read the News Literacy Project's [How to know what to trust](#), or if you're really feeling energetic, read the scientific report on psychological factors, from NIH's National Library of Medicine, called [Fake news: Why do we believe it?](#) Especially useful is its table called "Eight ways to spot misinformation."

This writer does not rely on social media for news, due to the influence of ai and rampant disinformation campaigns.

The [Associated Press](#) (AP), and [Reuters](#), also called wire services, have offices in most countries of the world and cover all areas of media. The majority of international news printed by the world's newspapers relies on them.

It's smart to read not only legacy media, but also other sources where journalists, historians, and subject matter experts write from. For example, some well-known journalists who have left their media outlets in protest of newsroom restrictions

now write on Substack, or for magazines like [The Atlantic](#), or [ProPublica](#). The historian [Heather Cox Richardson](#) provides daily insights about national events, particularly in Congress and the executive branch. Another Substack writer is [Anne Applebaum](#), author, journalist and foreign service expert who writes eloquently about “...democracy and dictatorship, Russia and Ukraine, America and Europe, local and global, past and present.” And for a smile to help you cope, try former New Yorker humor columnist [Andy Borowitz](#), whose daily headlines puncture multitudes of gaseous political balloons. If you prefer a slightly more conservative brand of humor, the [Babylon Bee](#) (“Fake News You Can Trust”) is reliably funny, too.

In an era where everything feels sensational and it can be hard to distinguish between real and tabloid journalism, the print and online legacy media are still what most people read. So, to explain some basics: A “[newspaper of record](#)” is a major national newspaper with a large circulation that must be well-staffed with reporters, has news-gathering and editorial functions that are authoritative, independent, and accountable, and is a “newspaper of reputation.” These can be ideologically conservative ([The Wall Street Journal](#)) or liberal ([The Washington Post](#), [The Guardian](#)). [The New York Times](#) and the [Los Angeles Times](#) are also considered newspapers of record. Unfortunately, public trust in large legacy media has declined due to political interference and restrictions placed on newsrooms by some billionaire owners. The Washington Post is an unfortunate example. Staffers there who left in protest have gone to [The New York Times](#), [The Atlantic](#), [ProPublica](#), [CNN](#), [Politico](#), and others.

Regionals like the [Seattle Times](#) are extremely useful, as are local papers like [The Leader](#) and the [Peninsula Daily News](#).

For space reasons, other online and broadcast media are excluded from this discussion. Bottom line: it’s a scattered media landscape now, and critical thinking skills are more important than ever to navigate it.

One more interesting “straight from the horse’s mouth” set of sources: [Reddit’s FedNews](#) provides a direct but anonymous feed from federal employees, and there’s a brand-new, promising website built by current and former government employees called “[We the Builders](#).” You can also read direct online sources such as the “Alt” or “Rogue” agency social media accounts, but be aware that the quality of these can vary.

Whether you agree or not with what the media publishes, accuracy and accountability are still important qualities, and your ability to discern what's true and what isn't are going to be more important than ever.



4. Sample letter to your representatives.

Feel free to copy, paste, update, and add your own material to this sample letter and send it to any and all elected representatives who remain silent about the damage being done to our government. Intended recipients are any elected officials of either party who are not speaking up about the unprecedented assault on our laws, government, and Constitution. This applies also to officials who are not necessarily in your own district. Names, addresses, websites, and phone numbers are in links in the next paragraph. If the Trump administration can flood the zone, so can we.

Don't forget to write to district offices as well as the ones in Washington D.C. House of Representatives [physical](#), [telephone](#), and [find/email your Rep by zip](#). Nationwide zip code [lookup here](#).

Options for contacting Senators: [website & postal addresses](#). [Telephone list](#).

Dear Senator/Representative _____,

I'm concerned about recent executive branch violations of the Constitution and federal law that overstep Congress' authority. Congress cannot let the Justice Department carry all the weight, because legal processes will take too long with the high rate of current violations. So why haven't you spoken up, or done so loudly enough?

I have specific questions that follow each of five examples, and I'm requesting your prompt reply. Thank you for your time.

1.) Administrative leave and firings: Federal law limits administrative leave to 10 days per year, yet DOGE's buyout offer to federal employees was full pay through September, well beyond that cap. This violates the [appropriations clause](#) of the Constitution, which says federal money can only be spent pursuant to an

appropriation by Congress. Congress has limited this salary appropriation to 10 days per calendar year. The buyout also violates the [Antideficiency Act](#), which prohibits federal employees from committing funds that haven't been appropriated. Elon Musk may be a "[special government employee](#)," but he has no power to make or change appropriations. If federal employees take his buyout offer, it's possible that they will be required to sign a contract committing them to it, after which the appointees who are running the Office of Personnel Management will be forced to argue that they cannot legally comply with payment because of the cap on administrative leave. Employees could end up being scammed. Some are already joining class action litigation. In addition, the mass firings of thousands of federal employees, including 18 Inspectors General and all of the military's Judge Advocate Generals (JAGs) violated law and policy. Agencies are authorized under [5 U.S.C. chapter 43](#) to demote or remove employees for "unacceptable performance." No such proof was ever supplied. Have you objected on the record to these violations of law, and if so, how? Have you communicated with federal employees in your district about this? Do you plan to?

2.) Treasury Department and other agency payment systems: The extraordinarily sensitive private information in these databases are covered by the [Privacy Act](#) and a number of other laws and regulations designed to protect Americans from identity theft. The data themselves do not indicate what is legal and what is not, and Mr. Musk is neither qualified nor authorized to decide. If reports are true that Musk's employees, none of whom have security clearances, have [copied this data](#) onto other servers, and if those servers get hacked or distributed, what is to prevent the bank accounts of millions of Americans from being emptied, and what are you doing to protect their privacy and safety? Please provide specific actions.

3.) Grants and spending: The Supreme Court ruled [nine to nothing](#) that while Presidents can make recommendations for cuts, they are obliged to spend the money as Congress directs. The [Impoundment Control Act](#) allows for an expedited process for a president's recommendations to be considered, but no president has this unilateral authority. Do you agree that this established legal precedent should stand, as it has since 1975, and if not, why not?

4.) Eliminating USAID and the Education Department: A [specific federal law](#) established the USAID agency, and [another law](#) established the Department of Education. Federal agencies cannot be eliminated just because a president and his assistant don't like them. They cannot be eliminated by Executive Order, and will continue to exist unless abolished by an act of Congress. Do plan to offer or

sponsor legislation to disband these agencies? If not, do you agree that contravention of established law is justifiable in disbanding a federal agency? If not, what are you doing about it?

5.) Elon Musk’s special status: Mr. Musk has claimed that he has the authority to do away with federal rules without going through the procedures required by the [Administrative Procedure Act](#). (See concerns #1, 3, and 4.) The funding freeze plunged not only the federal government but also state and local governments and other organizations that rely on federal funding into chaos. While the freeze has been blocked by a federal judge’s order, it has set the stage for a constitutional clash over who gets to determine the use of taxpayer funds. Do you agree that “special federal employees” without training, experience, or security clearances should have this much broad unilateral power? In your opinion as a lawmaker, was the funding freeze and the pain and chaos it has caused justified, and if not, what have you done to oppose it?

Thank you for your attention to my concerns. I await your reply.
Sincerely,

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