



Stretching Twin-size Revenues to Fit King-size Needs

By State Senator Jerry Ortiz y Pino
Member, Senate Finance Committee

The 2010 session of the State Legislature is faced with a massive job... with little time to accomplish it. This year is a “budget” session, limited to thirty days. Ordinarily that’s ample time to rework a budget, starting with a previous year’s revenues and expenditures and then projecting growth or slowdown. Not this year.

No, this year’s session will be far more challenging; a lot like the task of covering a king-sized bed (our needs) with twin-sized sheets (our revenues)...except that we still aren’t sure of the actual size of either the mattress or the linens. It’s guaranteed to create headaches for those making-up the bed--and to leave the citizen-occupants of that fiscal futon shivering, sleepless under inadequate cover.

So how did we get into this financial mess so quickly? Remember, just 18 months ago Governor Richardson called the legislature into special session to deal with a different dilemma: how to get rid of an unprecedented bonanza of state revenues! So much tax money was flowing into State cof-

fers in the summer of 2008 that New Mexico decided to return four hundred million to the taxpayers.

But, no sooner had those rebates and cuts been enacted than the economy hit the skids and within months we lawmakers were scrambling to fill a \$400 million gap (yes, the same amount we’d given back weeks earlier) in the 2009 budget... and to further reduce the 2010 budget (for the year that would begin on July 1, 2009) by another \$300 million.

But it gets worse: that slimmed-down budget (passed in March, 2009), even though it was based on revenue and spending projections that were \$600 million below the one passed in February of 2008 (\$5.5 billion compared to \$6.1 billion!) needed further pruning, so just three months ago the Governor called us back for another special session.

It produced more cuts in spending (we couldn’t discuss increasing taxes) and some shifting of money from nooks and crannies in the treasury into operating budgets. Once the dust cleared the net effect was that the budget for the current year (ending June 30) had shrunk to \$5.1 bil-

lion—a full billion dollars (or 16%) smaller than the one in effect a year and a half ago.

That’s dismal; but it will get worse before it gets better. There are at least three main reasons for this. Every New Mexican needs to understand them to interpret what will be going on in Santa Fe from now until the citizen-legislators head home in mid-February.

Reason # 1: the cuts imposed during October’s special session were minimal, designed to cause the least amount of pain for a short time, until the long-hoped-for upturn in the economy kicks in and revenues get back to “normal”. Unfortunately, the economy is not improving and tax revenues dip each month. This is because 10% of New Mexico’s workforce is now laid off and not earning, buying or paying taxes. Unemployment benefits and food stamps provide survival but you can’t grow an economy on them.

So October’s “minimal” cuts won’t get the job done in January. The gap (that metaphorical king-size mattress)

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The Near-Death and Rescue of ABQ’s Public Access

By Marvin H. Gladstone

(Editor’s Note: This article addresses problems which have confronted Quote. . . Unquote, Inc., a nonprofit corporate fiscal sponsor of FOAT, the nonprofit corporate publisher of The Trial Balloon. The author is a board member of both of these nonprofits. The opinions expressed below are the author’s alone and do not necessarily reflect those of either entity or its other directors or officers.)

Such phrases as “cooked and baked” and “tailoring the specs” are familiar to those engaged in the fine art of evading legal standards governing procurement. They are less familiar to the victims of such evasions, typically both the honest bidder and the taxpayer, the former having been cheated by reason of his honesty, the latter receiving less quality for more of his money. The beneficiaries of dishonest procurement practices are those contractors who have successfully rigged the bids, and the equally-crooked politicians who have favored them as quids pro quo for campaign contributions or worse.

Examples of “cooking and baking,” “tailoring specs” and other forms of bid-rigging abound, but a particularly egregious episode occurred here recently. Had the scheme succeeded, it would have adversely impacted not only the “honest bidder,” but cable subscribers numbering in the six digits, an unsuspecting public and the First Amendment guarantees of speech and press freedoms. This article summarizes the relevant events giving rise to the jeopardy and the salvation of

our Public Access channels.

Prior to 1996 it was a given that the airwaves were publicly-owned property; and that those seeking to exploit their use for profit-making were licensees only. A radio or television licensee was obliged to demonstrate a public benefit as a condition to its profit-making exploitation of such publicly-owned property. With the advent of cable TV, that benefit took the form of a statutorily-mandated channel-capacity reservation to the public for so-called “PEG” (Public, Educational, Governmental) use. The rights granted to cable companies to exploit the publicly-owned airwaves, as well as to lay their cables in publicly-owned rights-of-way were governed by federal law and by statutorily-conforming “franchise agreements” between, commonly, municipalities (as “franchisors”) and cable companies (as “franchisees”). Among other statutory prescriptions were limitations upon franchise fees chargeable by franchisors, and (with respect particularly to the “Public Access” element of the PEG triumvirate), non-interference with the First Amendment rights of Public Access producers and programmers.

As cable TV experienced exponential growth through the 80’s and 90’s, so too grew its lobbying budgets. Particularly irksome to some, if not most cable companies was the federal statutory requirement for allocating otherwise-profitmaking slots to the non-profit PEG channels. The very notion that the airwaves were public, not private property was deemed by them archaic, as was the obligation to grant the public access to them. And the inability to dictate content to Public Ac-

cess channels was equally repugnant to many of the politician-recipients of cable company lobbying largesse.

Thus had it regrettably come to pass that the historic federal statutory requirement for PEG access and funding was written out of the 1996 Telecommunications Act (largely dictated by the telecom companies and, shamefully, signed into law by then-President Bill Clinton that year).

Now, while the 1996 Act eliminated the statutory requirement for the provision of PEG channels, it did not prohibit the inclusion of such requirements in contracts negotiated between franchisors and franchisees; and, where such provisions were negotiated as part of franchise agreements, federal law continued the First Amendment freedom of speech protections. With the federal PEG mandate gone, it would become the responsibility of local governments, as franchisors (and as the entities whose authorizations would be required to lay cable in publicly-owned rights-of-way) to negotiate on behalf of its citizens fair and equitable provisions for granting access by the public to its own airwaves. For local politicians to bargain on behalf of constituents and against cable corporate campaign contributors would require significant public pressure. In many municipalities such public pressure proved insufficient, and the public thus lost its access to its own airwaves.

Such had not been the case in Albuquerque. Public Access (the “P” in “PEG”), traces its origins here to 1979, the year Quote. . . Unquote, Inc.

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Transitions

By V.B. Price

American political culture has moved into a period of stagnation that has no end in sight. So has New Mexico’s. The status quo won’t budge. Nor will the dead weight of the recession.

It looks like we’re in for a grinding transition from an old world of cheap energy, stable weather, and clean water, a world that’s falling apart before our eyes, to a new situation perhaps of enriched opportunity in crisis -- for those with the capital to take advantage of it -- but also a conundrum of dead ends for the rest of us who work but have little money to keep body and soul together.

I can hear Republicans and fat cats crooning away with a nasty smirk, “Oh that’s all just doom and gloom, doom and gloom.” That may be so, but how does one be both realistic and empowering at a time like this? The status quo is eating us alive. Ways exist to move it off our necks, but they’re all but dormant at the moment.

Nationally, health care reform, despite the prodding of millions of people, will be about as exciting as changing one pair of sneakers for another. The deep misery of joblessness has become chronic. Housing starts are all but dead. Food stamps keep more people alive than ever before. Corporate money controls political discourse and creates fewer and fewer jobs in America.

Banks horde taxpayer money and make virtually no loans. Peak oil looms, and alternative energy founders in mires of investor uncertainty and the petroarchy’s relentless PR assault on the competition. We’re locked into two wars, and into a war economy, that’s grinding down a generation of volunteer soldiers, flattening and terrifying civilian populations in numerous countries, and providing no jobs to speak of for America’s unemployed. The cost of education continues to grind down students. Our politics have descended into mad ankle biting; the Parties can carry out no new ideas; Big Business dominates and serves no one but itself. And America, along with most of the rest of the world, won’t get off the dime about climate change and widespread environmental pollution, thereby assuring unimaginable suffering for billions of people.

Locally, the status quo is like a big mono and matate, grinding optimism into a fine powder. The recession has clamped its jaws on the state. Major employers are faltering. State government is seriously cutting back on jobs; the state’s universities are too. Students are paying higher tuition, and going deeper into debt. The poor are poorer. The building trades are suffering with low housing starts. Businesses across the board are downsizing to keep afloat.

And worse, we have no sense of common purpose. We know the booms of the past won’t come again, and yet we keep hoping they will.

That’s where the politics of polarization has brought us. Into the pit of a dark transition with no consensus on how to get out.

Is there anything to be done? The old ways that have brought us here are not going to get us out. Where do we look for leadership? Right now, I think, there is only one answer - ourselves.

There is a new reality emerging, a complicated one that’s difficult to foresee or totally comprehend. But the keystone of this new reality is emerging from the fog. It has to do with decentralization, personal responsibility, and associations of like-minded people. Individual and small group action is about as decentralized as you can get.

I’m not suggesting some utopian or survivalist strategy of adapting to an uncertain future. I am suggesting that those who conceive of the good life as a tapestry of self-reliance and local community building do not have to wait for uncertainty to lift. We can start climbing out of the pit of this chaotic, malign transition right now.

Decentralization of energy is a telling example. It takes power away from the global corporations and industries. Personal energy resources, for instance - from conservation, to solar and wind power on our houses - contributes to a liberation from the suffocating status quo. All forms of decentralization does. Especially improving local conditions and supporting local businesses, schools and cultural institutions.

Buying locally grown food, cultivating local culture though support of local art, music and literature, keeping out of chain stores and restaurants and buying books, meals out, home repair items, and clothing from local businesses, finding common ground with neighbors, supporting local issue-based organizations - these all nurture local talent, local risk takers, and local advocates without descending into provincialism or succumbing to globalism.

Decentralization is not only a keystone to the future, but also a hallmark and a sign to follow. It’s surely not an infallible strategy, but it’s probably the least fallible at the moment. Why would anyone trust big banks, big oil, big chem, big insurance, big anything, after the unholy mess they’ve made for the rest of us. And why would anyone wait for them to revive and rescue us?

We all need to get agile, learn to trust ourselves again, stay curious, look for local solutions we can depend on, and wean ourselves from the cold comforts of the dead-end past, and get in shape to make good decisions in a hurry.

Argentina: Solar Villages Light Up the Andes

By Marcela Valente,
Inter Press Service

Buenos, Aires - The residents of the Puna, the dry Andean highlands in northern Argentina, are cut off from everything—except the sun. Living on arid land thousands of metres above sea level, they are on their way to becoming “solar villages.”

“In the north and northwest of Jujuy province, people are finding that solar energy, a clean and inexhaustible source, can replace firewood, which is increasingly scarce. The EcoAndina Foundation is showing the way through a series of projects.”

The Puna, at altitudes of 2,700 to 4,600 metres above sea level, is part of the vast Andean Altiplano shared by Argentina, Bolivia, Chile and Peru.

EcoAndina’s goal is to improve living conditions for local residents by sustainably harnessing the abundant sunshine and wind, while maintaining the cultural and historic identity of local indigenous communities.

Since it began its efforts two decades ago, some 400 solar energy units—which power family and community kitchens, bread ovens, heaters and hot-water tanks—have been installed in 30 towns in the region.

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for the year that starts July 1, 2010, the 2011 budget year, is fast approaching another \$1 billion! That’s a 20% cut in a smaller budget, and together with the \$1 billion that’s already been squeezed from our 2009 original budget, we are faced with what will be a 33% smaller state government than just two years ago...if we try to fill the gap completely by cutting spending. I know Republi-

In addition to cooking in solar stoves and ovens, which have proven as effective as gas stoves, the families now have heat and hot water in their homes. In the schools, solar panels warm the classrooms and photovoltaic panels produce electricity.

One of the projects involves developing technology to verify reductions of carbon dioxide emissions resulting from using solar ovens. Certification of emissions reductions will help gain access to carbon credits, which can be sold on the market, and the revenue would be invested in new sustainable energy devices in the Puna.

The stoves, which can be used inside or outside the home depending on the model, are manufactured in the region at low cost. The mostly widely used are the parabolic stoves, which are made with highly polished aluminium to concentrate the sun’s rays.

These techniques allow residents to replace other sources of energy, particularly firewood and fossil fuels, which release carbon dioxide and contribute to climate change.

In the high plains region of arid and semi-arid soils and fragile and scant vegetation, replacing firewood also helps fight desertification. The altitude and dry environment mean that plants grow very slowly, and

people have to travel farther and farther from home to find firewood.

Studies by EcoAndina show that one solar oven reduces household firewood consumption by 50 to 70 percent.

Silvia Rojo, president of EcoAndina, explained to Tierramérica that the people of the Puna region have traditionally used three types of plants for firewood: the “tola” bush; “queñoa,” a high-altitude tree; and “yareta,” a cushion-shaped shrub. But collecting these sources has led to serious desertification, the loss of species and damage to watersheds.

The other choice besides firewood is propane gas, which is sold in 10-kg cylinders at high prices in this remote area. “The bottled gas costs 13 times more per cubic metre than the methane supplied by public networks in the cities,” said Rojo.

“Our work is focused on offering thermal energy alternatives to firewood and gas to about 30 villages,” she said.

Today the applications of solar energy “enjoy broad acceptance and high demand, which is why we are spreading the word on solar villages,” she said. To achieve that status, the communities receive training with the support of the United Nations Development Programme’s Global Environment Facility.

The first solar village is Laguni-

llas del Farallón. “It is a category that gives the community a higher standing and fills it with pride, because the residents are recognised for using clean technologies,” said Rojo.

The circuit is being completed with other towns, which in the coming years will be meeting their energy demands sustainably: Ciénaga de Paicote, Cabrería, Paicote, Cusi Cusi, San Juan y Oros, La Ciénaga, San Francisco, Casa Colorada and Misa Rumi.

The first location where EcoAndina began its work was Misa Rumi, where a house that is completely powered by solar and wind energy has been operating since 1997 as the headquarters for fieldwork and research.

The Puna is ideal for solar and wind energy. The high plain, part of the Andes mountain range, is very dry, and temperature swings are extreme and abrupt, Christoph Müller, a German expert who works with EcoAndina on technical questions, told Tierramérica.

In a single day in winter, the temperature can range from 20 degrees Celsius during the daytime to 25 below zero at night. The sky above the altiplano is completely clear during most of the winter.

That makes the Puna one of the areas with the most sunshine in the

world, along with the Bolivian Altiplano and the high plains of Tibet and Afghanistan—and an ideal site for exploring the potential of solar energy.

For now, the initiatives are limited to providing energy and heat to the homes, community centres and schools, but ambitions could go far beyond this.

Rojo said EcoAndina is promoting the idea of a solar generator to supply electricity to all of Jujuy province without producing greenhouse gas emissions or pollution, at nearly zero production cost. If it becomes reality, it would be the first in Latin America, though Brazil and Chile are also pursuing similar projects.

“It would not be able to cover all the tiny towns in the north of the province because they are so dispersed, but they already have community photovoltaic systems in each town,” Rojo said.

(This story was originally published by Latin American newspapers that are part of the Tierramérica network. Tierramérica is a specialised news service produced by IPS with the backing of the United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Environment Programme and the World Bank.)

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ishing stores and appliance salesmen not earning money. That’s a lot of money not circulating through the economy. That’s a lot of gross receipts and income taxes not being paid for government services. And it happened almost overnight!

Reviving our home building industry is not stalled because of lack of demand or because we have killed incentives for the builders. It’s a consequence of the global banking crash and the resulting burnt-fingers syndrome by the bankers who finance home construction or purchases. In a word, until the credit squeeze eases, New Mexico’s economy will continue to wallow. Housing is our number one economic driver. We won’t get better until it gets better.

Reason # 3: things would have been much worse this year without the \$500 million in Federal “stimulus” funds which buffered the hits to Medicaid and public schools. Now, though, that windfall cushion has gone and a big chunk of the \$1 billion shortfall we face is due to needing to replace that temporary boost from the Feds.

The truth is that New Mexico is not spending wildly or foolishly as some conservatives would suggest. The reason our budget is short is not an excess of spending, but because our revenues went in the tank. And

as we examine how to survive until the usual sources of State revenue get closer to their historic performance levels, we should be very leery of simply cutting back on an already-lean budget. Instead, we need first to consider restoring some of the billion a year in recurring tax revenues that have been trimmed away during the Richardson years.

If we increase the size of the sheets (revenues) then shrinking the mattress (spending) wouldn’t be so damaging. And despite threats from conservatives that “a recession is not the time to increase taxes”, we can easily find at least half the billion dollars we need by closing loopholes and corporate giveaways--without impacting the working families of New Mexico one bit. Here are a few ideas that add up to more than the \$500 million I’d like to see us enact.

Reinstate a progressive tax rate structure for personal income taxes. Successive cuts have flattened our tax tables so that now a couple earning \$30,000 a year in taxable income pays the same 4.9% rate that a couple earning \$300,000 or that a couple earning \$3 million pays. That flies in the face of common sense and the traditional concept that those who can afford more should pay more. That single step could generate over \$250 million a year in new revenue—without affecting most working families.

New Mexico, alone among west-

ern states, allows a double deduction for state and local taxes. California doesn’t permit deductions for New Mexico taxes paid on income...but we permit our tax filers to deduct California taxes before computing New Mexico’s taxes. What purpose does that loophole serve? It could generate \$60 million a year or more, if plugged.

Then there are sin taxes we could pass: alcohol, tobacco, junk food and soft drinks. Making those indulgences taxed fairly could produce another \$100 million or more. New car sales could be made subject to the gross receipts tax...instead of the 3% excise tax now charged...and that would produce \$100 million. There’s the \$500 million we need to finish making the bed.

Polls show New Mexicans are reluctant to cut school funding (60% of the budget) and support holding Medicaid spending (another 18%) as harmless as possible. Thus, new taxes have to be considered because we simply can’t cut a billion dollars from the remaining 22% slice of the pie that amounts to just \$1.2 billion. You see the problem...and the solution. All it takes is some legislative backbone.

It is closer now to Spring than it was in November.

From the FOAT Board

This publication by the Friends of the Albuquerque Tribune (FOAT) happens bi-monthly because many volunteers invest their time, energy, and funds. We are a non-profit, and a community owned opportunity to bring citizen journalism to Albuquerque.

Many writers have supported this effort and contributed outstanding work to create this publication. Volunteers help at all the stages of production. Janet Bridgers brought her expertise to launch our advertising. Astrid Webster does copy editing and proof reading, as well as guiding content. Deborah Kolberg contributes proofreading skills. Francis Rausch actually distributes thousands of copies of each issue to sites she monitors. She does this as she walks! Alex and Andrew Kolberg add computer skills to assist the editor, Rosamund Evans.


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The Board shares the organizational tasks of the non-profit, but the treasurer Marvin Gladstone, carries a heavy load.

We will very soon make a name change and do the necessary restructuring to reach more readers efficiently. Your ideas are welcome. Contact us at: 505 903-7778; or at ABQ TRial Balloon, P O Box 35058, Albuquerque, NM 87176-5058.

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Cesar Chavez is shown at left; Thurgood Marshall is shown at right.
Photo illustration by Bruno Garcia, brgarcia@themonitor.com

Textbooks may shed civil rights icons

By Jennifer L. Berghom

A debate is raging over what counts as history in Texas public schools.

Perhaps most notable is the question of including historical figures such as Thurgood Marshall, the first black U.S. Supreme Court justice, and labor leader and civil rights activist César Chávez, in the curriculum — as well as whether the country’s founding fathers wanted church and state to be separate.

The State Board of Education is hearing public testimony today on proposed updates to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for social studies. It plans to vote on the proposal Friday and is expected to take a final vote on the matter in March.

TEKS standards serve as a guideline for school systems to follow in adopting textbooks and creating curricula for subjects. They are usually updated about every 10 years.

But over the past year, experts appointed by board members to review and write guidelines for the social studies curriculum have clashed as to which figures should be included and how they should be represented, with conservatives assailing the inclusion of Marshall and Chávez.

Board member Mary Helen Berlanga, who represents Cameron and Willacy counties and part of Hidalgo County, said minorities receive very little mention in the history books currently used. She worries school books will mention even fewer minority figures if the conservative experts get their way.

By way of example, she noted how little information textbooks include about Tejano patriot Jose Antonio Navarro, as well as Adina Emilia De Zavala and Clara Driscoll, two women who fought to preserve the Alamo in the early 20th century.

“I think it’s time we paint an accurate picture of history,” Berlanga said.

So far, much of the squabbling has surrounded conservatives’ push to exclude particular historical figures like Marshall and Chávez. But beneath such spats lie far deeper ideological tussles, over disputed biblical underpinnings of the nation’s founding; the notion of the United States as uniquely superior, even divinely ordained; and the proper context and credit in exploring the struggles of oppressed minority groups.

Dagoberto Eli Ramirez, social

studies coordinator for the La Joya school district, said he’s concerned that conservatives’ proposed changes to the standards might not accurately represent the state and country’s diversity.

Being the social studies coordinator for a large district — La Joya has more than 27,000 enrolled students — with an overwhelming majority of its students being Hispanic, Ramirez said he’s concerned that any omission of the contributions made by Hispanics could send the wrong message to the children.

“Children get this false representation that they don’t count. (The TEKS revision conservatives propose) doesn’t reflect the reality,” he said.

Changes to how history and other subjects under the social studies umbrella are taught not only affect students at the grade school level.

South Texas College history professor Trinidad Gonzales said many of his freshman students come into his U.S. history class with little knowledge of the fundamentals of how the country formed and how its system of government works.

“The most common comment I hear from students is, ‘Why didn’t they teach us this in high school?’” said Gonzales, who teaches U.S. history, women’s history, and Mexican-American history courses at the college.

What some conservative experts are suggesting for the TEKS update is problematic and anti-scholarly, Gonzales said. Omitting the role of women and minorities in the development of the country presents an inaccurate view of history and hurts the democratic process today.

“How you see the past is how you see the present,” he said. “Women and minorities have contributed greatly [to the country’s growth and success], and to deny that perpetuates the current racist and sexist [attitudes that exist].”

Texas Tribune, a nonprofit, non-partisan public media organization that operates www.texastribune.org, contributed to this report. Its mission is to promote civic engagement and discourse on public policy, politics, government, and other matters of statewide concern through original journalism and on-the-record, open-to-the-public events. The Monitor uses its content free of charge.
Jennifer L. Berghom covers education and general assignments for The Monitor. She can be reached at (956) 683-4462.

More Than a Sportswriter: Lester “Red” Rodney: 1911-2009

By Dave Zirin
Huffington Post, December 23, 2009

It didn’t make SportsCenter, but one of history’s most influential sportswriters died this week at the age of 98. His name was Lester Rodney. Lester was one of the first people to write about a young Negro League prospect named Jackie Robinson. He was the last living journalist to cover the famous 1938 fight at Yankee Stadium between “The Brown Bomber,” Joe Louis, and Hitler favorite, Max Schmeling. He crusaded against baseball’s color line when almost every other journalist pretended it didn’t exist. He edited a political sports page that engaged his audience in how to fight for a more just sports world. His writing, which could describe the beauty of a well-turned double play in one sentence and blast injustice in the next, is still bracing and ahead of its time. He should be in the Baseball Hall of Fame. Instead he was largely erased from the books.

If you have never heard of Lester Rodney, there is a very simple reason why: the newspaper he worked at from 1936-1958 was the Daily Worker, the party press of the U.S. Communist Party. Lester used his paper to launch the first campaign to end the color line in Major League Baseball. I spoke to Lester about this in 2004 and he said to me, “It’s amazing. You go back and you read the great newspapers in the thirties, you’ll find no editorials saying, ‘What’s going on here? This is America, land of the free and people with the wrong pigmentation of skin can’t play baseball?’” Nothing like that. No challenges to the league, to the commissioner, no talking about Satchel Paige and Josh Gibson, who were obviously of superstar caliber. So it was this tremendous vacuum waiting.”

The campaign was integrated into the Party’s anti-racist work of the 1930s: “I spoke to the leaders of the YCL [the Young Communist League]. We talked about circulating the paper [at ballparks]. It just evolved as we talked about the color

line and some kids in the YCL suggested, ‘Why don’t we go to the ballparks—to Yankee Stadium, Ebbets Field, the Polo Grounds—with petitions?’ We wound up with at least a million and a half signatures that we delivered straight to the desk of [baseball commissioner] Judge Landis.”

As Lester fought to end the Color Ban, he also never stopped highlighting and covering the Negro League teams, giving them press at a time when they were invisible men outside of the African American press. But it was Jackie Robinson who captured Lester’s imagination. Armed with a press pass to the Ebbets Field locker room, Lester saw up close the way Robinson was told to “just shut up and play” despite the constant harassment during his inaugural 1947 campaign. “Jackie was suppressing his very being, his personality,” said Lester. “He was a fiercely intelligent man. He knew his role and he accepted it. And the black players who followed him knew what he meant too.”

Lester saw the way their play—and their courage—helped inspire the struggle for Civil Rights, especially in the South. Lester told me about a dramatic exhibition game in Atlanta where all the dynamics of the Black Freedom Struggle were on display. “This exhibition game wound up with the Black fans being allowed in because they had overflowed the segregated stands; they had poured in from outlying districts to see the first integrated game in Georgia history. The Klan had said, ‘This must not happen.’ That night there was this tremendous sight of Robinson, [Dodgers African American players] Don Newcombe and Roy Campanella coming out and the black fans behind the ropes and in the stands standing and roaring their greeting. A large sector of whites were just sitting and booing. Then other white people, hesitantly at first, stood up and consciously differentiated themselves from the boos and clapped. This was an amazing spectacle. This was the Deep South many years before the words civil rights were widely known. So

it had its impact . . . Roy Campanella, once said to me something like, ‘Without the Brooklyn Dodgers you don’t have Brown v. Board of Education.’ I laughed, I thought he was joking but he was stubborn. He said, ‘All I know is we were the first ones on the trains, we were the first ones down South not to go around the back of the restaurant, first ones in the hotels.’ He said, ‘We were like the teachers of the whole integration thing.’ “

Lester would still become emotional when he recalls Jackie Robinson and his impact. “There are very few people of whom you can say with certainty that they made this a somewhat better country. Without doubt you can say that about Jackie Robinson. His legacy was not ‘Hooray, we did it,’ but ‘Buddy, there’s still unfinished work out there.’ He was a continuing militant, and that’s why the Dodgers never considered this brilliant baseball man as a manager or coach. It’s because he was outspoken and unafraid. That’s the kind of person he was. In fact, the first time he was asked to play at an old-timers’ game at Yankee Stadium, he said ‘I must sorrowfully refuse until I see more progress being made off the playing field on the coaching lines and in the managerial departments.’ He made people uncomfortable. In fact it was that very quality which made him something special. He always made you feel that ‘Buddy, there’s still unfinished work out there.’ “ We can absolutely say the same about Lester Rodney, albeit with a twist. Yes, Lester made you feel like there was unfinished work out there. But he also made you feel like the great fun in life was in trying to get it done. That and seeing a perfectly turned 6-4-3 double play.

[For more on Lester Rodney, read Press Box Red by Irwin Silber] [New York Times Obit: <http://tinyurl.com/yfk3wdm>]

Dave Zirin is The Nation’s sports editor. He is the author of Welcome to the Terrordome: the Pain Politics and Promise of Sports (Haymarket) and A People’s History of Sports in the United States (The New Press).

Good News

By Rob Ritchie

FairVote has been the catalyst for a new national drive for universal voter registration and voter pre-registration, which, when combined with widespread civic education, promises to move us toward 100% registration of young would-be voters. We have also been at the forefront of the call to ensure that no Senators serve without election by the people they represent. On Tuesday, Rhode Island’s state legislature overwhelmingly overrode vetoes of two FairVote-initiated reform measures: voter pre-registration for 16 and 17-year-olds and elections for all U.S. Senators. Four states and Washington, D.C. have now adopted this reform in just the past 20 months.

Also on Tuesday, the city council of Oakland, California voted decisively to implement instant runoff voting for their November 2010 mayoral and council elections, sparked by the New American Foundation and an impressive community movement. Oakland’s move may well lead other Alameda County cities to enact IRV this year.

Minnesota’s Saint Cloud State University released a survey on Minneapolis’ first IRV elections for mayor, city council and other offices last November. 65% of voters want

to keep IRV, a whopping 95% found it easy to use, and there was only one voter error in ranking first choices in the entire election. Similarly positive survey results were reported by North Carolina State University regarding the recent IRV election in Hendersonville, NC.

The Democratic National Committee’s “Change Commission” on the presidential nomination process has recommended starting nomination contests later in the year and requiring so-called “superdelegates” to vote in proportion to the popular vote outcome in their respective

states. The MetroWest Daily News (MA) this week came out strongly in favor of the National Popular Vote plan to ensure that every vote for president has equal weight, while Dave Zweifel in Wisconsin’s Capital Times writes, “The National Popular Vote movement could bring that change to ensure that the people—not a convoluted archaic system—determine who is president.”

FairVote’s new video predicts that the 2010’s will be the biggest reform decade in a half-century—and the new decade’s first week means we’re off to a good start.

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When religion goes rancid, there will be hell to pay....

By John Shipley, B.A., M.Div.

Recent disruptions in the body politic have resulted in the question: “When did civil discourse become so uncivil?”

Answers vary but include things like: 1) The divisiveness was caused by the election of Barak Obama to President; 2) The origins lie within the contested election of George W. Bush to President; 3) Congressional hearings on the nomination of Robert Bork to the Supreme Court; 4) Watergate; and 5) Vietnam. The answer correctly lies in earlier historical events: Engel v Vitale in 1962 and Abington School District v Schemp in 1963.

Engel v Vitale was the Supreme Court decision which prohibited government written and mandated prayer in the public schools. Abington School District v Schemp prohibited forced Bible readings in public schools.

These two decisions were widely and wrongly interpreted to ban God from the public schools. In point of fact Engel v Vitale did not ban prayer from schools and Abington School District v Schemp did not ban the use of the Bible in the school curriculum. Such details were and are lost on Fundamentalists who continue to bemoan, in anger, what they interpret as hostility to religion.

To be precise, “Fundamentalism” is a 19th century invention wherein it was claimed that in order to be considered “Christian”, five “fundamentals of belief were necessary. They include 1) inerrancy of scripture; 2) virgin birth of Jesus; 3) substitutionary death (atonement); 4) physical resurrection; and 5) the second coming of Christ.

Two other developments of the 19th century became a direct challenge to the fundamentalists. The first was the publication of Charles Darwin’s “On the Origin of Species” and the second was the development of a format for the study of scripture known as “form criticism” which sought to apply basic research techniques to the study of scripture.

The writing of Darwin called into question the accuracy of the two creation stories in Genesis, with expected hostility. It still angers many fundamentalists who opt for more compatible notions like what is called “creationism” or its more formal cousin, “intelligent design”. As with the prayer case and the Bible reading case, the Courts have found the teaching of creationism and intelligent design to be unconstitutional use of religious doctrine in the public schools.

Religious leaders reacted to the Engel case and the Abington case with unmasked hostility and anger.

Norman Vincent Peale, Billy Graham and Cardinal Spellman all issued statements openly attacking the Supreme Court. Whatever the actual meaning of the scriptural admonition to “render unto Caesar”, the battle lines were drawn and remain today. In the view of the complaining religionists, the Ten Commandments were superior to and favored over the Ten Amendments known as the Bill of Rights, and any other part of our Constitution.

On the political side of the equation the battle was also joined. The John Birch Society publicly denounced the findings of the Court and erected billboards calling for the Impeachment of Earl Warren, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Other extremist political groups joined in this angry confrontation between the community of faith and our constitutional form of government.

The reason Darwin was so hated is that his research and writing called into question the first of the five fundamentals, i.e., inerrancy of scripture. To see how the challenge presented take an 8 1/2 x 11 sheet of paper. Draw a line from top to bottom in the center of the page. On the left side of the paper list the order of creation in Chapter 1 of Genesis. On the right side of the paper list the order of creation found in Chapter 2 of Genesis. It will become immediately evident that the two creation stories are different. Inerrancy is lost.

An example of why form criticism was so hated can be found in the New Testament. By turning to the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John it can be seen that the fifth of the fundamentals is challenged.

By reading the texts of each, beginning with the resurrection appearances, it will be seen that not once did Jesus say anything about returning...not one single word. The apocalyptic visions and the “Left Behind” notions all have their origins in texts other than those attributed to Jesus. Upon his reported resurrection Jesus never once mentioned he was coming back.

These open challenges to the authority and integrity of religious thought and teachings has left a lot of people really angry. When their fundamentalism is joined to conservative (reactionary) political thought they create a new being: the angry American. They leave mainline denominations and form mega-churches, all of which are non-doctrinal. They establish sectarian schools or home schools to displace public education. And they teach a kind of Protestant fundamentalist “Sharia”. They place their belief above and as more important than science, the constitution, “activist judges” and all the other contemporary demons they think they are called to resist in the name of Christ. If you want to know where all the lack of civility has its organs you need only follow the words of President Harry S. Truman: “They need to read their history.”

What It Takes to Build a Movement

By Mark Rudd

Since the summer of 2003, I’ve crisscrossed the country speaking at colleges and theaters and bookstores, first with The Weather Underground documentary and, starting in March of this year, with my book: Underground: My Life with SDS and the Weathermen (William Morrow, 2009). In discussions with young people, they often tell me, “Nothing anyone does can ever make a difference.”

The words still sound strange: it’s a phrase I never once heard forty years ago, a sentiment obviously false on its surface. Growing up in the Fifties and Sixties, I and the rest of the country knew about the civil rights movement in the South, and what was most evident was that individuals, joining with others, actually were making a difference. The labor movement of the Thirties to the Sixties had improved the lives of millions; the anti-war movement had brought down a sitting president, LBJ, March 1968 and was actively engaged in stopping the Vietnam War. In the forty years since, the women’s movement, gay rights, disability rights, animal rights, and environmental movements have all registered enormous social and political gains. To old new lefties, such as myself, this is all self-evident.

Something Is Missing

So, why the defeatism? In the absence of knowledge of how these historical movements were built, young people assume that they arose spontaneously, or, perhaps, charismatic leaders suddenly called them into existence. On the third Monday of every January we celebrate Martin Luther King Jr. having had a dream— knowledge of the movement itself is lost.

The current anti-war movement’s weakness, however, is very much alive in young people’s experience. They cite the fact that millions turned out in the streets in the early spring of 2003 to oppose the pending U.S. attack on Iraq, but that these demonstrations had no effect. “We demonstrated, and they didn’t listen to us.” Even the activists among them became demoralized as numbers at demonstrations dropped off very quickly, street demonstrations becoming cliches, and, despite a big shift in public opinion in 2006, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan droned on to today. The very success of the spontaneous early mobilization seems to have contributed to the anti-war movement’s long-term weakness.

Something’s missing. I first got an insight into articulating what it is when I picked up Letters from Young Activists: Today’s Rebels Speak Out, edited by Dan Berger, Chesa Boudin and Kenyon Farrow (Nation Books, 2005). Andy Cornell, in a letter to the movement that first radicalized him, “Dear Punk Rock Activism,” criticizes the conflation of the terms “activism” and “organizing.” He writes, “Activists are individuals who dedicate their time and energy to various efforts they hope will contribute to social, political, or economic change. Organizers are activists who, in addition to their own participation, work to move other people to take action and help them develop skills, political analysis and confidence within the context of organizations. Organizing is a process creating long-term campaigns that mobilize a certain constituency to press for specific demands from a particular target, using a defined strategy and escalating tactics.” In other words, it’s not enough for punks to continually express their contempt for mainstream values through their alternate identity; they’ve got to move toward “organizing masses of people.”

Aha! Activism = self-expression; organizing = movement-building.

Until recently, I’d rarely heard young people call themselves “organizers.” The common term for years has been “activists.” Organizing was reduced to the behind the scenes nuts-and-

bolts work needed to pull off a specific event, such as a concert or demonstration. But forty years ago, we only used the word “activist” to mock our enemies’ view of us, as when a university administrator or newspaper editorial writer would call us “mindless activists.” We were organizers, our work was building a mass movement, and that took constant discussion of goals, strategy and tactics (and, later, contributing to our downfall ideology).

Thinking back over my own experience, I realized that I had inherited this organizer’s identity from the red diaper babies I fell in with at the Columbia chapter of Students for a Democratic Society, SDS. Raised by parents in the labor and civil rights and communist or socialist movements, they had naturally learned the organizing method as other kids learned how to throw footballs or bake pineapple upside-down cakes. “Build the base!” was the constant strategy of Columbia SDS for years.

Yet, young activists I met were surprised to learn that major events, such as the Columbia rebellion of April 1968, did not happen spontaneously, that they took years of prior education, relationship building, reconsideration on the part of individuals of their role in the institution. I.e., organizing. It seemed to me that they believed that movements happen as a sort of dramatic or spectator sport: after a small group of people express themselves, large numbers of bystanders see the truth in what they’re saying and join in. The mass anti-war mobilization of the Spring 2003, which failed to stop the war, was the only model they knew.

I began looking for a literature that would show how successful historical movements were built. Not the outcomes or triumphs, such as the great civil rights March on Washington in 1963, but the many streams that eventually created the floods. I wanted to know who said what to whom and how did they respond. One book was recommended to me repeatedly by friends: I’ve Got the Light of Freedom: the Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle by Charles M. Payne (University of California Press, 1995). Payne, an African-American sociologist, now at the University of Chicago, asked the question how young student organizers of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, SNCC, had successfully organized voter registration and related campaigns in one town, Greenwood, Mississippi, in the years 1961-1964. The Mississippi Delta region was one of the most benighted areas of the South, with conditions for black cotton sharecroppers and plantation workers not much above the level of slavery. Despite the fact that illiteracy and economic dependency were the norm among black people in the Delta, and that they were the target of years of violent terror tactics, including murder, SNCC miraculously organized these same people to take the steps toward their own freedom, through attaining voting rights and education. How did they do it?

Successful Traditions

What Payne uncovers through his investigation into SNCC in Greenwood is an organizing method that has no name but is solidly rooted in the traditions of church women of the rural South. Black churches usually had charismatic male ministers, who, as a consequence of their positions, led in an authoritarian manner. The work of the congregations themselves, however, the social events and education and mutual aid were organized at the base level by women, who were democratic and relational in style. Martin Luther King’s Southern Christian Leadership Council, SCLC, used the ministerial model in their mobilizing for events, while the young people of SNCC, informed by the teaching and examples of freedom movement veterans Ella Baker and Septima Clark, concen-

trated on building relationships with local people and helping them develop into leaders within democratic structures. SNCC’s central organizing principle, “participatory democracy,” was a direct inheritance from Ella Baker.

Payne writes, “SNCC preached a gospel of individual efficacy. What you do matters. In order to move politically, people had to believe that. In Greenwood, the movement was able to exploit communal and familial traditions that encouraged people to believe in their own light.”

Participatory Democracy

The features of the method, sometimes called “developmental” or “transformational organizing,” involve long-term strategy, patient base-building, personal engagement between people, full democratic participation, education and the development of people’s leadership capabilities, and coalition-building. The developmental method is often juxtaposed to Alinsky-style organizing, which is usually characterized as top-down and manipulative. For a first-hand view of Alinsky organizing, though it’s never named as such by a trained and seasoned practitioner, see Barack Obama’s book, Dreams from My Father (Three Rivers Press, 1995 and 2004). In the middle section of the book, “Chicago,” Obama describes his three years organizing on the streets and housing projects of South Chicago. He beautifully invokes his motives, improving young people’s lives, but at the same time he draws a murky picture of organizing. Questions abound: Who trained him? What was his training? Who paid him? What is the guiding ideology? What is his relationship to the people he calls “my leaders?” Are they above him or are they manipulated by him? Who are calling whose shots? What are the long-term consequences? It’s a great piece to start a discussion with young organizers.

While reading I’ve Got the Light of Freedom, I realized that much of what we had practiced in SDS was derived from SNCC and this developmental organizing tradition, up to and including the vision of “participatory democracy,” which was incorporated in the 1962 SDS founding document, “The Port Huron Statement.” Columbia SDS’s work was patient, strategic, base-building, using both confrontation and education. I myself had been nurtured and developed into a leadership position through years of close friendship with older organizers.

However, my clique’s downfall came post-1968, when, under the spell of the illusion of revolution, we abandoned organizing, first for militant confrontation (Weatherman and the Days of Rage, Oct. 1969) and then armed urban guerilla warfare (the Weather Underground, 1970-1976). We had, in effect, moved backward from organizing to self-expression, believing, ridiculously, that that would build the movement. At the moment when more organizing was needed to build a permanent anti-imperialist mass movement, we abandoned organizing.

This is the story I tell in my book, Underground. It’s about good organizing (Columbia), leading to worse (Weatherman), leading to horrible (the Weather Underground). I hope it’s useful to contemporary organizers, as they contemplate how to build the coming mass movement(s).

Mark Rudd lives and teaches in Albuquerque, N.M. He can be reached at www.markrudd.com.

“A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death.”

- Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Mega-Media Era Begins as Comcast/NBC Merger Nears

By Josh Silver
December 1st, 2009

On Monday night, French media giant Vivendi and NBC parent company General Electric agreed to terms that will clear the way for US cable giant Comcast to take a controlling stake in NBC Universal. An announcement from Comcast is expected within days. The proposed merger would create a media behemoth, and clear the way for an unprecedented era of media consolidation across cable, the Internet and broadcast television.

Be afraid. Comcast is both the largest cable company and the largest residential broadband provider in the United States: a \$34-billion business with 24 million subscribers, reaching nearly one out of every four homes in the country. NBCU owns NBC, MSNBC, CNBC, Universal Studios, 27 television stations, and a host of other properties.

President Obama has promised that his administration would finally begin enforcing antitrust laws to prevent unreasonable consolidation of market power. If ever a media deal posed such a threat, this is it. The merged Comcast would be to media what Goldman Sachs is to Wall Street: “a great vampire squid wrapped around the face of humanity, relentlessly jamming its blood funnel into anything that smells like money,” as Rolling Stone’s Matt Taibbi once described the latter.

It should come as no surprise that

“QUQ” was chartered as a New Mexico not-for-profit corporation. Its sole function was to initiate and operate a Public Access Cable TV facility pursuant to the then-effective federal requirement. QUQ commenced operations in 1981 and has, over more than 28 years of continuous service, trained more than 8,000 amateur videographers, producers and editors who have broadcast hundreds of thousands of hours of their own programs on Channel 27. It has won three awards as the nation’s best Public Access Channel, runs an authorized state-of-the-art Apple Training Center, founded a media arts charter high school (the first state-chartered school in New Mexico) and, with no increase in funding since 1991 (its funding being the lowest per capita of any comparable operation in the country) initiated and operates, in addition to Channel 27, its new “Local Origination” Channel 26. Its programs are videostreamed and viewed worldwide, enjoying “hits” typically exceeding 120,000 per month.

As a consequence of these and other extraordinary achievements, public support has thus far saved Albuquerque’s Public Access from the fate of many access centers across the country.

A scheme, however, (which, had it succeeded, would have doomed Public Access here) appears to have germinated in or shortly prior to the early Spring of last year. The City had negotiated a franchise agreement with Comcast Cable back in 2002. Among its provisions were (a) a five percent franchise fee payable by Comcast subscribers to the City (estimated to yield, currently, an average of \$3.5 to \$4.0 million per year); (b) a \$0.44 charge per subscriber per month to fund equipment and other capital needs of the PEG channels (estimated to yield an average of some \$600,000 per year), (it is noted that both parties to the franchise agreement function only as conduits for these funds, the subscribers being the contributors); (c) an obligation assumed by Comcast to provide PEG analog and digital channels, including a “Local Origination Channel” to be operated by the Public Access

Wall Street and Washington are saying this is already a done deal: The media and telecommunications industry is second only to drug companies in how much it spends lobbying Washington. Its army of PR firms, lobbyists and sock-puppet think tanks is already blitzing the press corps and Capitol Hill. It’s readying Comcast CEO Brian Roberts for his close-up as a new media mogul and neglecting to mention the impact of this deal on everyday people.

Comcast has raised cable rates for years while raking in record profits nearly every quarter. It is anti-union. It cares nothing for independent, alternative programming. And if you’re a startup television channel, you can forget about getting a spot in Comcast’s lineup. Comcast will charge you far more for space on its lineup than you could possibly pay. Just ask Al Gore about his failed effort to get his Current TV a reasonable position in the cable lineup.

Let’s not forget that Comcast is the company that was caught illegally blocking peer-to-peer Internet downloads and then lying about it—earning a smack-down from the FCC for breaking Net Neutrality rules. And the company is known for blocking TV ads it didn’t like. The company’s track record of protecting the public’s interest isn’t exactly stellar.

And now, Comcast is set to control media across all distribution platforms. The company is threatened by the increasing amount of free content on the Net, and a public who is both

contractor (QUQ being the named designee); and (d) an obligation assumed by the City to house the PEG channels and to fund their operating expenses.

With respect to Public Access, the City had undertaken to perform this latter function by underwriting the operational expenses of QUQ to the extent of leasing and building-out space to accommodate its needs (albeit minimally and grudgingly), paying moving and utility costs, and funding day-to-day operations to the extent of \$270,000 per year (the amount having been virtually unchanged since 1991).

The most recent physical accommodation for Public Access was a lease of some 17,000 square feet of ground floor space in the abandoned old Bernalillo County Courthouse. The lease (providing, inter alia, for a dollar-a-year nominal rent), required the City to pay the utilities. As of April, 2009, QUQ had operated Public Access Channel 27 for some five years under such arrangement.

Now, it is important to note the persistence of two (among many) conflicts over the years, both of which bear upon the events giving rise to the death-defying events of late 2009. The first of these conflicts is that which has been ongoing between the City and the County for many years. (One of the many irritants is the County’s ill-conceived assumption of liability for one-half the costs of operating the Government Center - One Civic Plaza - while occupying only 28% of the building!) The second of these relevant conflicts is between the City administration and QUQ arising, in part, from the latter’s refusal to engage in prior censorship of those programmers or guests who may wish to air opinions critical of the former.

As what many believe to have been a manifestation of the City Administration’s (but not that of its governing body – the City Council) consequent hostility to QUQ’s adherence to First Amendment principles, the City, in late 2008 published a Request for Proposals (RFP), soliciting bidders, effectively other than QUQ, as a replacement for the continued

watching entertainment on the Internet, and creating their own. NBC owns a major stake in Hulu, and Comcast likely wants to put the video service and all NBC content behind a paywall. Comcast and other cable companies are already putting the final touches on “TV Everywhere,” a paywall that requires a traditional cable subscription to watch online content owned by these companies. Comcast’s very survival depends on remaining the gatekeeper between you and the programs you want to watch, and it wants as little competition as possible.

Worse still, if the Comcast-NBC merger is allowed to go through, it will be the start of a catastrophic storm: a tidal wave of mega-deals by other content giants like News Corp. and Disney merging with distribution behemoths like Time Warner Cable and AT&T. In a nation where 98 percent of Internet users have only one or two choices of Internet service providers, we could witness a future in which a handful of phone and cable companies, merged with a handful of content companies, will put all premium content behind a paywall and make all other content hard or impossible to find.

ISPs’ content and applications—and those of their partner companies—will move at light-speed, while the rest of the Internet will seem like it’s still on dial-up. The result: homogenized corporate content, higher prices and fewer real alternatives so that distributors can prevent the

operation of Public Access Channel 27. For many reasons (not the least of which were 27 years of successful prior continuous operation, its cumulative expertise and its ownership of much essential equipment – all being unique to QUQ) the procurement process which ought to have been followed was “single source negotiation,” rather than illusory “competitive bidding.” The administration’s election to utilize the latter, rather than the former, should have suggested a malign rather than a benign motivation, a suspicion to gain support from later events. Whether or not there was at that time an already-hatched scheme to switch to a less scrupulous (with respect to First Amendment principles) operator, any such expectation was disappointed when QUQ appeared as the only “bidder.” Its “Proposal” in response to the RFP was, perforce, approved, albeit reluctantly, by the Administration in early 2009. QUQ’s Proposal, submitted in accordance with the requirements of the RFP, and its approval by the Administration effected a contract which would bind both parties for the ensuing four years.

QUQ’s approved Proposal included its initiation and implementation of the “Local Origination Channel” for which the 2002 Franchise Agreement provided. The “seed money” sought by the Proposal was a nominal \$35,000. Relying upon the Administration’s approval, QUQ proceeded with the organization of its new, second channel which, when effected, would permit solicitation of revenue-producing “sponsorships,” anticipating a potentially-significant funding source for its continued operation. Such a funding potential for a non-profit entity would surely be most irksome to any profit-oriented ideologue. That the nonprofit here should be supported by cable subscribers through the public treasury, might well have suggested opportunities for self-aggrandizement which no ethically-challenged businessman could easily ignore.

With the inauguration of Local Origination Channel 26 at a Cinco de Mayo ceremony on the Civic Plaza, QUQ now became the proud operator

“market fragmentation” that advertisers loathe. Sound familiar? The Internet will become the cable service of the 21st century—instead of the free and open arena for economic innovation, democratic participation and free speech that it’s been.

Some say that companies like Comcast are simply doing what they

of two back-to-back ABQ TV channels, the new one enjoying a revenue-producing potential, and both capable of corruption for partisan political ends. These exploitive possibilities appear to have proved irresistible to those rarely troubled by temptation. (They invariably yield to it!) Added to the inducements for mischief was the accrual, as of the spring of ’09, of a reported \$1.8 million in unexpended “\$0.44 funds,” potentially usable by a secretly-favored Administration supporter to fund such “capital” requirements as might enable a switch of Public Access operators. But, the Administration having just contracted with QUQ for the provision of the two-channel services, how might it renege on that agreement?

The answer to the Administration’s self-propounded question was to create an apparently-justifiable basis for disavowing its contractual obligations. To achieve that malign objective the Administration, without notice to QUQ, in April simply discontinued paying the old Courthouse utility bills, following which the County served the City with a 30-day Notice to Quit. Upon receipt of a delayed report from the City of its impending eviction QUQ successfully implored the County to defer, temporarily, its dispossession-by-force, while aggressively initiating a search for a minimally-acceptable relocation site. Having itself generated QUQ’s impending homelessness, the Administration now utilized that disability – the soon-to-be absence of a facility – to disclaim its four-year contractual obligations; and it ordered the promulgation of a new RFP!

Before the order could be implemented, however, the Administration achieved a well-earned lame-duck status by unexpectedly losing the Mayoral election. But, as its swansong payoff to the supporter waiting in the wings (enhanced, no doubt, by vindictiveness against QUQ), the loaded RFP replacement effort proceeded apace, looking to its effectuation prior to the December 1 swearing in of the newly-elected Mayor.

Using the new RFP as the tool to implement the “cooked and baked” scheme required a reversal of the

must to prosper. But we need to ask whether boosting Comcast’s bottom line is worth the cost to the rest of us. Such market power could destroy the promise of an open Internet and its unprecedented ability to amplify independent voices, reinvent journalism, and inspire new forms of entertainment.

While QUQ prepared to litigate its contractual rights, and before the outgoing Administration could perfect its misbegotten illegal scheme, the newly-elected administration took office and ordered the new RFP withdrawn. Had the scheme been suffered to proceed to its ignominious conclusion, both channels would have “gone dark,” as no new operator (even, unlike in this instance, one dealing in good faith) could have continued seamlessly running two television channels without a lengthy interruption, regardless of the material resources which might have been made available to it.

The decisions to withdraw the illegal new RFP (thereby honoring the City’s contractual commitment and preventing a fraud upon the cable subscribers and the public) will stand to the everlasting credit of ABQ’s new Administration.

The significance of this rescue must be measured against the extraordinary number of access closures in 2009, and continuing into this new year. Cable companies and their compliant politicians have regrettably succeeded in depriving the public of access to its own airwaves across the country, from Florida (virtually all shut down) to California (more than 50 killed including at least 12 in L.A.).

As of this writing Channels 26 and 27 continue their search, now with the welcomed assistance of the new Administration added to that of the City Council. And, with the County’s much-appreciated indulgence, these important public access facilities hope shortly to find a new home.

Merger Facts

Serving Size: 1 Mega-Merger

Amount Per Serving*	
Saturated Media Ownership:	2 giant companies
Comcast reaches 1 out of every 4 cable subscribers. NBC owns 27 local TV stations, and the NBC network reaches 95% of U.S. homes with TVs.	
Fat Profits:	Over \$50 Billion in Revenue
Comcast 2008 revenues:	\$34.3 billion
NBC/Universal 2008 revenues:	\$16.9 billion
Total Control:	1 out of every 5 viewing hours in the U.S.
Comcast	22 cable channels including E!, Style, G4, Comcast Sports Net, the Golf Channel, PBS Kids
NBC	30 cable channels including NBC, Telemundo, MSNBC, Bravo, USA, CNBC & part of Hulu
Level of Healthy Competition:	Nearing 0%
Comcast would charge competitors more for NBC shows. Comcast would control even more of the ad market.	
Cost to Consumers:	Big Bucks
Comcast already hikes its rates 8% every year. With less competition, they'll jack up prices even more. Cable rates for customers nationwide will increase when Comcast starts charging its competitors more for NBC programs.	
Diversity of Viewpoints	Even Fewer
One company will control more news & information. Comcast will prioritize NBC programs instead of local & independent voices.	
*Based on a healthy media diet, enriched by diverse & independent viewpoints & quality journalism.	
WARNING: This merger could be hazardous to the health of our democracy.	

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By Bill Nevins

John Hammond in Concert with Stan Hirsch

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John P. Hammond’s long career—at least thirty-four albums, a Grammy, seven WC Handy Awards and countless hundreds of performances—ranges from the coffeehouses of the 1960s to grand concert halls to the joyful “endless tour” which is his life today. Whether playing blazing electric guitar with his full band, or stunning acoustic solo gigs, Hammond sings in a barrelhouse style which demonstrates what longtime musical collaborator Tom Waits meant when he said of him, “John’s particular dialect in music is that of Charley Patton’s shoe size and Skip James’s watch chain. He has a blacksmith’s rhythm and the kind of soul and precision it takes to cut diamonds or to handle snakes.”

Son of legendary jazz writer and record producer John Hammond, Jr., John Paul Hammond has long established his own right to sing and play the blues with authenticity and true fire. He is the living touchstone for this vital American music, and one of the world’s acknowledged authorities on its history.

I’ve collected his albums since high school, and attended John Hammond shows from his 1967 NY City anti-war march performance on a flat bed truck through his Philadelphia Blues Festival starring gigs and his many sold out El Rey and Outpost shows in Albuquerque. I remember the unrestrained joy of fans when Hammond stepped down from a Philly stage after his gig to chat and proudly show us one of his cherished National Steel guitars. He’s that kind of guy—down to earth and happy to share his love of music. The man is a bridge among generations—he jammed with Muddy Waters and Eric Clapton and introduced Bob Dylan to the ace musicians who became The Band. One of Hammond’s major fans is youthful hip hop soul-man G. Love, who produced and appeared on Hammond’s album Push Comes to Shove. Despite all this, John Hammond always displays a gentle grace and a charming, humor-laced modesty.

I interviewed John Hammond late in 2007 in New Mexico during his tour in support of his album, Push Comes to Shove, and we caught up by phone again recently to talk about Hammond’s greatly anticipated Low Spirits show with Albuquerque blues icon Stan Hirsch.

(That concert is sure to sell out. Get your tickets NOW!)

Low Spirits is the newly opened blues-and-roots friendly music room in Albuquerque’s North Valley neighborhood. Opened by music lover Joe Anderson in December 2009, Low Spirits has already established its reputation for a comfortable relaxed atmosphere, cheerful welcomes and the finest touring and locally-based truly soulful musicians around. Mississippi Hill Country blues masters Cedric Burnside and Lightnin’ Malcolm will perform there on January 20, songwriter Cole Mitchell on January 23, and future gigs include The Albuquerque Blues Connection, Ryan McGarvey, Exene Cervenka and many surprises to be announced.

John Hammond’s latest 2009 CD, Rough and Tough, like its predecessor Push Comes to Shove, is distinguished by inclusion of several original Hammond-penned songs alongside the older Delta Blues of which Hammond has become a most venerated and admired interpreter. (Hammond’s album of classic Robert Johnson songs, At the Cross Roads, was recently released by Vanguard Records and his album of Tom Waits compositions, Wicked Grin, is itself now a treasured classic of Americana music. For a complete discography, visit www.johnhammond.com).

Recent interview with John Hammond

I spoke with John Hammond again by phone on January 13, 2010 two weeks before his Low Spirits concert. John told me of the glad recent news that his latest album Rough and Tough has been nominated for a Grammy.

JH: I’m surprised and delighted by this Grammy nomination. The album is a solo performance, and it includes two of the songs I wrote while working with G. Love on the Push Comes to Shove album, so that feels especially good.



BN: Does the changed social climate—the election of Barack Obama, the many economic and international developments of the past year—impact your performances or how your music is received?

JH: Well, that’s a tough question. Certainly events influence everybody’s feelings. But really, I don’t think politics has that much to do with this music I play. Blues is its own entity, a traditional art form that outlasts political changes. Blues is a uniquely American folk art that’s spread all over the world. Blues is not for everyone, for those of us who connect with it, it has become much of what we are about and it is forever fascinating. At least that’s how its been for me. This music sort of captures the human condition, in almost every aspect of that varied experience. It’s a very passionate thing. You’re either very much into it, or you’re not.

BN: Your audiences are always intently focused on your performances, and you seem to guide them along, sometimes giving explanations of the history of the songs or getting a laugh with a story about your meetings with blues performers over the years. It really feels like a community come together at your shows, a very comfortable feeling.

JH: Thanks, that is the way we like it to be. The blues is a shared time together, and a good one, we hope.

BN: On the last page of his book Escaping the Delta, author Elijah Wald discusses your meetings with a number of elder blues musicians, documented in the film Searching for Robert Johnson. The context is the old story that Johnson met the devil, and the larger concept of blues as directly related to hoo doo and dark magic in some way. Wald thinks some fans and writers may have put too much emphasis on this debatable aspect of the blues. What’s your opinion?

JH: At some point in an artist’s life there may come a time when they can do what they want to do. It’s just a process that happens when you discover what your niche is and you find that you can work in that art deeply. It is not a bad thing at all. Now, some people might find a need to express that feeling in a mystical or spiritual context. The rural South, especially back in the early 20th century, was very religious. If you played music and you did not play church music, then it was said that you were playing the devil’s music—so the blues was called devil’s music. Certainly rock n roll was called that, sometimes still is! That didn’t mean it actually was music from the devil! But, you know, as I said, the blues is not for everybody.

BN: You draw on a repertoire of hundreds of blues songs, and you continue to write your own new songs in recent years. Do you have a set list, and can you tell us what you plan to play at your Albuquerque Low Spirits show later this month?

JH: (laughing): I have no idea! Whatever comes forward at the time. I never have a set list. I just play what seems to be for me at the time. I discover that when I am on stage, and it always seems to happen.

BN: Thanks, John. We’re looking forward to your visit to Albuquerque.

JH: My pleasure—I am, too..

The Earthquake That Triggered A Global Empathic Response: What The Haitian Crisis Tells Us About Human Nature

By Jeremy Rifkin
Author, *‘The Empathic Civilization: The Race to Global Consciousness in a World in Crisis*

Frantic tweets and videos have been seeping out of Haiti, pleading for help from the rest of the human race in the aftermath of a devastating earthquake that leveled one of the poorest countries on the planet, spreading destruction and death.

The response by people all over the world has been immediate. Governments, NGOs, and individuals are mobilizing relief missions, and social websites are lighting up, as the collective human family extends a global empathic embrace to its neighbors in this small Caribbean nation. We saw a similar global response in the wake of Hurricane Katrina that devastated New Orleans and the gulf coast of the United States and the giant tsunami that struck Asian and African coastlines earlier in the decade.

In recent years, whenever natural disasters have struck, in what is increasingly becoming a globally interconnected and interdependent world, human beings have come together as an extended family in an outpouring of compassion and concern. For these brief moments of time, we leave behind the many differences that divide us to act as a species. We become Homo empathicus.

Yet, when faced with similar tragedies that are a result of human-induced behavior, rather than precipitated by natural disasters, we are often unable to muster the same collective empathic response.

For example, recall when oil hit a record \$147/barrel on world markets in July, 2008. Prices soared and basic necessities from food to heating oil became prohibitively expensive, imperiling the lives of hundreds of millions of human beings. Food riots broke out in more than 30 countries. Yet, the collective response of the human race was barely perceptible. Similarly, plagued with the real-time impacts of human induced climate change, which is already devastating ecosystems in countries around the world and creating millions of environmental refugees, the global response has been weak.

The question is: why? It’s true that unexpected natural disasters quickly arouse our attention. But, my suspicion is that this is not the only reason that we are unable to respond to human induced suffering with the same emotional and cognitive focus. The problem lies much deeper. When human induced behavior results in suffering to others on a large scale, we tend to shrug our shoulders as if to say, “that’s human nature and therefore, there’s not much we can do about it.” That’s because we have come to think of human nature as essentially selfish. Our beliefs have become a self-fulfilling prophecy—even if they turn out to be incorrect.

At the dawn of the modern market economy and the nation-state era, the philosophers of the Enlightenment argued that human beings are autonomous agents, and are detached, rational, and driven by material self-interest and utilitarian pursuits.

But, is that who we really are? If so, then how do we explain the empathic response to natural disasters like the one that occurred in Haiti this past week. Perhaps our ideas about human nature merely reflect the operating assumptions of the modern market economy and provide those in power with an easy way to justify and explain the suffering inflicted on others, writing it off as a reflection of our species’ aggressive, predatory and selfish behavior.

But, what if these age old assumptions about human nature are false? In the past 15 years, scientists from a wide range of fields, from evolutionary biology to neurocognitive research and child development, have been making breathtaking discoveries that are forcing us to rethink our long-held beliefs about human nature. Researchers are discovering mirror-neurons--the so-called empathy neurons--that allow human beings and other species to feel and experience another’s situation as if it were one’s own. We are, it appears, the most social animals and we seek intimate participation and companionship with our fellows.

It is only when our basic biological drive of empathic engagement is repressed or denied that secondary drives like aggression, acquisitiveness, and selfish behavior come to the surface.

It turns out that empathic consciousness has grown steadily over history. Our forager/hunter ancestors only extended primitive empathic distress to their immediate blood relatives and extended family. With the rise of the world’s great religions, empathic consciousness extended to those of like-minded religious affiliation. Jews empathized with Jews, Christians with Christians, Muslims with Muslims, etc. In the modern market economy and nation-state era, the empathic embrace extended to people sharing a common national identity. American empathized with Americans, Germans with Germans, Japanese with Japanese, etc.

Today, distributed information and communication technologies are bringing together the entire human race in an extended family. Is it so difficult, then, to imagine a leap to biosphere consciousness and the extension of empathy to our species as a whole and to the other creatures that cohabit this planet with us? Think for a moment, about the global empathic response when a young college pre-med student was gunned down in the protests that followed the flawed Iranian election. Within minutes, millions of college students around the world were viewing a cell-phone video of the killing and were extending their empathy to the young people in Iran. Or consider the release of the video showing a polar bear and her cub stranded on an ice floe in the arctic because of global warming. Millions of youngsters around the world instantly empathized with the plight of the mother and her cub.

Schoolchildren everywhere are learning that their everyday behavior--the food they eat, the electricity they use, the family car they drive in, and myriad other consumer habits intimately affect the wellbeing of every other human being and every other creature on Earth. This is the emergence of biosphere consciousness and the beginning of the next stage of our evolutionary journey as an empathic being.

Now we need to prepare the groundwork for an empathic civilization that is compatible with our core nature. This will require a rethinking of parenting styles, reforming our educational system, reinventing our business models, and transforming our governing institutions so that the way we live our lives is attuned to and, in accord with, our fundamentally empathic nature.

Lest we think this is an impossible task, consider again the global empathic outpouring for the victims of the Haitian earthquake. Then ask, why we can’t harness that same global empathic embrace, not only to rescue victims of natural disasters, but also to raise generations of empathic global citizens who can live together in relative peace and harmony in a biosphere world.

This appeared in Huffington Post.

Gaza Update

By Sally-Alice Thompson

After more than a year, echoes of the Israeli assault on Gaza are still ricocheting up and down the canyons of time.

An account of a United Nations investigation of the Gaza incursion, the Goldstone Report, noted that war crimes and possibly crimes against humanity were committed by both the Palestinians and the Israelis. The document is named for South African Justice Richard Goldstone, who headed the investigation. The UN General Assembly adopted it by a vote of 114-18, the United States and Israel leading the dissent.

The Israeli government responded to the report ferociously. Any criticism of their actions is completely unacceptable. They labeled the Report “biased” in spite of the fact that they had launched an attack on a largely unarmed civilian population who could not flee to safety due to being walled in.

To mollify the American-Israeli lobby, Rep. Howard Berman (D-CA) and Ileana Ros-

Lehtinen (R-FL) introduced H Res867, “calling upon the President and the Secretary of State to oppose unequivocally any endorsement or further consideration of the ‘Report of the United Nations Fact Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict (the Goldstone Report)...’ In spite of impassioned statements by Rep. Dennis Kucinich (D-OH) and others condemning the resolution, it passed by a vote of 344-36, with 22 abstentions.

Two New Mexico representatives, Martin Heinrich and Ben Lujan, by abstaining, were among those courageous enough to stand up against the ongoing American policy of granting the Israeli government immunity for any crimes it chooses to commit, and denying any effort to make it accountable. However, they were not quite courageous enough to vote “no”. Our southern representative, Harry Teague, voted “yes,” to help ensure the American message that anything the Israeli government does is legal.

In the year following the assault, the Gaza residents have been under siege, unable to ob-

tain food, medicine, or building materials to repair their devastated homeland. The only goods that have arrived there have been smuggled through underground tunnels.

To mark the anniversary of the assault on Gaza, a group 550 internationals, dubbed the Viva Palestina Convoy, laden with humanitarian aid, have repeatedly attempted to evade the barriers and enter Gaza. Included in the Viva Palestina Convoy are three New Mexicans: Lori Rudolf and Will Covert of Albuquerque and Ken Mayer of Santa Fe. They have been forbidden entrance to Gaza by the governments of Israel and Egypt. .Egypt is complicit in the entrance refusal in order to protect the large grants it gets, courtesy of the America taxpayer. Members of Viva Palestina have been subject to beatings and tear gas attacks by Egyptian police.

As of now about one hundred members of the Convoy have been permitted to enter Gaza. None of the New Mexico members were included in that number.

Gaza Freedom March

By Iris Keltz

Historic events took place last week that received scant media attention in this country. Grassroots activists are on the move. More than 1,400 people from 42 countries assembled in Cairo on the eve of the new year planning to bring humanitarian aid into Gaza. This Freedom March included prominent authors, activists, educators, clergy, journalists, concerned citizens and interfaith groups including devout Jewish Pagans like Starhawk whose eye-witness blog was shared around the world. A separate relief convoy, known as Viva Palestina, left Britain on December 5 and would have met the Marchers on December 27 had Egypt not changed their demands for entry.

A group of concerned citizens, including myself, stood in front of the Federal Courthouse as part of the non-violent global mobilization of cities and countries across the world. They flew kites in Afghanistan, held vigils across Europe, Turkey, Canada, the US—and-Israel/Palestine. In Sderot, an Israeli town on the Gaza border, children tied letters of peace to white balloons and sent them south. Israelis and internationals stood in Bethlehem, Ramallah and the Eretz Crossing. In Albuquerque, we read the names of children killed during the siege and recited prayers in Hebrew, Arabic and English. Icy hands were warmed by kindred spirits. Passing cars honked in support but there was no TV, radio or newspaper to carry the story.

December 27th marked the one-year anniversary of Israel’s 22-day siege on Gaza. Horrifying weaponry were used on an impoverished, mostly refugee population of 1.5 million, half under the age of seventeen, depriving them of power, wa-

ter, food and access to medical care. Targeting hospitals and educational institutions including international and UN schools—effectively destroyed the infrastructure of civil society, leaving 1400 dead, a third of them children. Thousands of people live in tents or the ruins of destroyed homes which have not been rebuilt because reconstruction material remains barred from entering. Israeli tanks have left but the complete closure of Gaza’s borders, airspace, coastline and access to the sea, continues.

Collective punishment of a civilian population is against international law. The fourth Geneva Convention requires all signatory governments, including Israel, Egypt and the US, to protect civilian populations under Occupation.

When the Egyptian government blocked activists from entering Gaza, eye-witness blogger-journalists, hoping to raise international awareness and support, described the subsequent chaos and spontaneous sit-ins that occurred outside the French and American Embassies and the United Nations building. Hemmed in by barriers and security forces, people chanted, drummed and shared energy bars. Hundreds tied notes to a bridge crossing the Nile. A Santa Fe Vet for Peace, wrote—“I am an American Jew who mourns the loss of 1400 brothers and sisters in Gaza.” Other protesters crossed the Sinai Desert only to be placed under house arrest. At the last minute, the Egyptian government allowed two busloads of internationals to enter the besieged Strip where they were welcomed by thousands, including the Hamas led Palestinian government. Will Covert, from Albuquerque, reported that the 50 teddy bears he’d brought as gifts to children living in an orphan-

age were onboard the scaled-down convoy. Among the 100 Freedom Marchers were four Orthodox Jews who celebrated the Sabbath in Gaza City.

In an attempt to block the tunnel economy, a lifeline of food, medicine, animals, motorcycles as well as illegal traffic, the US is spending billions to erect a 50-foot steel barrier, sunk into the earth, under the border between Egypt and Gaza. Our government provides Israel with more military aid than any country in the world. Egypt is second.

The bulk of the international marchers may have been prevented from entering Gaza but before dispersing, they created a statement of solidarity, affirming their commitment to: Palestinian Self-Determination, Ending the Occupation of Gaza, East Jerusalem and the West Bank, Equal Rights for All within historic Palestine and the Right of Return for refugees. They pledged to support the Palestinian call of July 2005 for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) to compel Israel to comply with international law.”

Yesterday, the blogs jubilantly reported that after traveling 5,000 miles across Europe, Turkey, Syria and Jordan, the Viva Palestina Convoy entered Gaza with medical aid and was greeted by a thousand cheers and people carrying flowers. Mission Accomplished! Breaking news today: Israel launched a midnight attack, flying F 16’s over densely populated areas of Gaza spreading fear and panic among civilians who were asleep. The European, mostly Irish convoy is still there. Apparently Israel believes their mission is not accomplished.

Iris Keltz is an author, teacher, activist, and above all else a grandmother.

Human Rights News Letter

By Mazin Qumsiyeh

Dear friends:

I gave a talk at the NATO Defence College in Rome to some 82 officers and civilians from many NATO countries and affiliated or partner countries (including Egypt, UAE, Jordan, etc). An Israeli colleague who lives in London also presented his point of view and read on things and then we took questions. We also participated in small group meetings and discussions. I was pleased with the level of sophistication, excellent questions asked, and hospitality we received. The commanding officers and all others were very kind to us. We will not forget this visit. While in Rome for three days we got to visit the Vatican including seeing the magnificent Sistine Chapel paintings. We got to tour the museums and also visit the Roman Forum and the Palatine. There, I was interested to see for the first time Titus arch which was built after the death of this emperor. On one of its panels it celebrates its victory over the Jewish rebels in Jerusalem.

Most people today identify with the Jewish rebels and not with the Romans. Even the guidebook to the ruins we were using referred to “destruction of Jerusalem” (actually careful and unbiased historians disagree with such a description since the rebellion was rather small and narrow and its was contained rather quickly with Jerusalem flourishing later except for limited access by the Jewish community which was then still a minority of the population of Palestine). Historians also tell us that Jews continued to live in small communities throughout Palestine (later many of them converting to Christianity or to Islam). Before this rebellion, Jews in Palestine had full autonomy with their own King (e.g. King Herod who condemned Jesus). The Roman administration was until this armed rebellion rather liberal in its dealings with ethnic and religious minorities. Before and after the rebellion, Palestine remained a multi-ethnic and multi-religious community despite many efforts of many rulers who failed to change it by military force sometimes succeeding for a few decades)one of the crusader kingdoms lasted 110 years before Palestine was restored to have Christian, Muslim, and Jewish communities living side by side). Let us hope that this is the last failed attempt to create a homogenous Palestine (aka Eretz Yisrael). I for one can never understand the desire to live in a homogenous state since variety is the spice of life.

Like Jesus who identified with and preached to Jew and gentile, I find myself identifying with both the Romans and the Jews of Palestine of that first century AD as I identify today with all communities in Palestine. This is first because they were human beings like all of us caught in a set of historical structures and machinations that left them in the situation they faced. I identified especially with the Jews who resisted Roman occupation non-violently. Jesus was to become the symbol of such power of such resistance. That the armed resisters ultimately failed (they ere called saccari because they hid their assassination knives in their cloths) while eventually the philosophy of Je-

sus spread like wild fire in the Roman Empire should be telling to us. It was three plus centuries and hundreds of thousands of martyrs before finally the Roman Empire decided itself to adopt Christianity rather than keep fighting it. Yet unfortunately as the Jewish theologian Marc Ellis articulated effectively, such a Constantinian (transformation of) Christianity in the form of state power would inevitably lead to the atrocities of the Crusades and far more (e.g. use of Christianity to justify colonization). Ellis further argues that the new Constantinian Judaism in the form of Zionism is equally damaging to Prophetic Judaism. One day I would like to write more on this but for now, the sight of ruins of great empires AND visiting with great people descendent of oppressors and oppressed and getting along in equality always remind me that we all die someday and that great stone edifices, palaces, and statues are all equally ephemeral while people remain and in many cases improve. And as the song goes, “in the end only kindness matters.”

Sure enough, I saw so much kindness, so much human beauty in Italy that trumps all other beauty. The last 24 hours we spent time in rural Italy among kind and generous farmers who remind me so much of Palestine (in the areas of Offida. San Benedetto, Ascoli). I think to myself that the hundreds of Palestinian villages (including my own of Beit Sahour) would have been just as nice, just as peaceful and tranquil as those villages if it was not for that Constantinian form of Judaism that decided to take on the crazy project of transforming a multi-ethnic, multi-religious society into a Jewish state (maximum geography and minimum demography). Instead, hundreds of villages, most dating to millennia (2-4 thousand years old) were destroyed and those like mine that remained lost so much land and received so many displaced people that their character is no longer what it used to be or would have been.

While we were here we followed closely the travails of the Gaza Freedom March (finally denied entry to Gaza) and the Viva Palestina Convoy to Gaza (finally allowed entry after detours and clashes). It is an honor to call many of the people in both groups friends. Actually we might miss seeing some of our Italian friends who are still in Gaza. I spoke tonight at San Benedetto to 50 people. Tomorrow, I speak in Milano, then in Turino on the 9th, possibly Bologna on the 10th then in Roma again on the 11th. I will then travel to Amman on the 12th. But as always, you are welcome to visit us in Palestine-

PS: Just to be clear, thanks to Israeli restrictions, less than 3% of Palestinians are able to travel like I do and a smaller fraction can actually do it financially or logistically and the numbers in Gaza are closer to 0.001%.

Mazin Qumsiyeh - A Bedouin in cyberspace, a villager at home (and now on a nomadic trip in Italy) <http://qumsiyeh.org>

Editors note: Dr. Mazin Qumsiyeh, a geneticist, moved his family from Connecticut back to Palestine and is a professor at the University of Gaza. He writes regularly from Gaza.

Israeli Feminists Decry Militarization of Israeli Education System

Press release, New Profile, 16 December 2009

The following press release was issued on electronicIntifada.net 13 December 2009 by New Profile following the group’s exclusion by the Israeli Minister of Education from Israeli high school debates on civil rights:

New Profile, the feminist movement to civilize Israeli society, wrote Minister of Education Gideon Saar this morning, strongly condemning his recent instructions to prohibit its members’ participation in high school debates convened by the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI) on questions of human rights and freedom of expression.

New Profile wrote the minister that his act had exposed the government’s true stand on civil rights and freedom of expression, also belying the Education Ministry’s professed respect for tolerance. “The minister’s step was taken in tandem with the decision he took to send yet more military personnel into schools—a move designed to increase enthusiasm for fighting,” New Profile advised in its letter. “For over a decade now, our movement has been cautioning of the danger of ignoring the wishes of students, parents and teachers to freely and openly discuss these subjects prior to the students’ induction into the military at age 18. The Minister’s present steps increase the repression of voices seeking to frame and examine social responsibility in non-militarized terms.”

New Profile’s letter explained that, “The perceptions transmitted by the present educational system generate an acceptance of warfare as a sound national strategy. They encourage veneration for the use of force and aggrandize Jewish nationalism, while devaluing the lives of Palestinians. At the same time, they sow rampant fear and dread

of a new Holocaust. Ongoing endorsement of the use of force in combination with the consistent enhancement of nationalism and constantly fanned fears, maintain a state of war and, also, of severe social stratification and inequality. The military has long since become a normalized, daily aspect of Israeli education and upholds war as the apparent, sole solution to Israel’s political problems. The continuous state of warfare serves as a pretext for prolonging the military occupation and seemingly excuses the State of Israel from its accountability to the Palestinian people but also, no less, its accountability to the young Israelis that it deploys to perform the occupying, policing, destruction and terrorization.” New Profile sharply criticized the abuse of authority evident in the minister’s ban, adding that his decision silences not only New Profile but also the voice of every individual striving for a free and open civil society discourse on relations of military and society.

New Profile members, the letter added—students, sisters, fathers, educators, citizens—welcome this moment of truth in Israeli education, clearly exposing it as an instrument of suppression, silencing independent thought and free expression among principals, teachers and students, who are barred from open debate on issues affecting the individual life, health and future of each and every student. All the above are officially forbidden to ask openly just who stands to gain or lose from compulsory conscription. New Profile “stand[s] by the many educators, parents and youngsters who are seriously troubled by the fact that 18-year-old boys and girls have been conscripted, for 60 years now, into years of near-forced labor, with almost no remuneration and harsh working conditions, due to a decades-old decision made in very different circum-

stances.”

Further, the letter notes that “military obedience and civil obedience are not one and the same. The military is an inherently hierarchical system operated through military commands. To avoid blindly obeying blatantly illegal orders, those serving in the military are left to rely on universal moral values potentially imbibed from their families or civil education. Students, however, are first and foremost citizens who should be guided to independent critical thinking. How can the education system and the educators who staff it faithfully perform their responsibilities when the head of this system openly dismisses their judgment, sending army officers to instruct them in love of one’s country, measured in force and bloodshed.

“Every instance of silencing stems from fear. A steadfast, confident position, a true respect for teachers and students, would allow these to listen, to discuss, and to choose their paths from the spectrum of available options. A Minister of Education who prohibits an open discussion of military and state by the very youths he designates to perform the orders of both, in fact impairs their ability to independent and complex thinking.

“New Profile has called consistently, for the past 10 years, for a thorough revision of Israel’s system of education; we demand its transformation into a system providing a democratic and civil education, an education compatible with peace, with negotiating resolutions to conflict, rather than mobilizing for organized violence.”

New Profile expressly calls on the Minister to address this core question: Why has he denied New Profile the inalienable right of every citizen to a freely expressed opinion and why should he deny students the right to decide on the type of society they wish to live in?

The State of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s Dream in 2010

By Dedrick Muhammad

Over 40 years after Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s assassination, his words still speak to the social conditions that so many Americans face. Our unemployment rate is hovering at 10 percent, and the wealthiest 10 percent of us control over 70 percent of the nation’s wealth. Economic inequality remains a barrier to greater racial equality. The national commemoration of King’s birthday, therefore, is more for reflection than celebration.

During one of the worst economic crises seen in this country, black/white economic inequality is still a vast and greatly under-recognized challenge for this country. Two generations past the 1960s civil rights movement, African Americans make less than 60 cents on every dollar of income for whites. Their unemployment rate stands at 150 percent of the national average.

As King fought to end this country’s racial divisions, he recognized that economic inequality was as great a barrier to his vision of a more racially inclusive America as Jim Crow segregation laws. Many forget that the March on Washington, where King delivered his famed “I Have a Dream” speech, was actually called the “March on Washington for Freedom and Jobs.” When one of the last great symbols of political hope, President John F. Kennedy, was in the White House, King called hundreds of thousands to come to the nation’s capital to fight for an America that would reflect its best values rather than its greatest fears. “We called our demonstration a campaign for jobs and income because we felt that the economic question was the most crucial that black people, and poor people generally, were confronting,” he told Look Magazine in 1968.

In 2010, after the first challenging year of the presidency of another man who came into office riding a wave of hope, Americans can honor King’s legacy by advancing a contemporary agenda of jobs, wealth building, and peace.

King and other civil rights leaders advocated progressive economic reforms with such proposals as the Bill of Rights for the Disadvantaged and the Freedom Budget of 1966. A new report from United for a Fair Economy that I co-authored builds on that work by advocating bold and progressive economic reforms to meet today’s challenges. Reforms proposed in this report, titled “State of the Dream 2010: Drained,” include a major jobs

See KING on page 11

US military is meeting recruitment goals with video games – but at what cost?

Amid a soaring suicide rate among soldiers, it’s worth looking at how the Army’s aggressive video games distort our impressions of war.

By Jamie Holmes

Washington – For the first time since the establishment of all-volunteer forces in 1973, the US military has met all of its recruiting goals.

This success can be attributed in part to the new video games and graphic novels aimed at America’s youth. It may sound like the US military has solved a major recruitment problem, but there may be a high cost.

In another first, suicides among US soldiers have hit a post-Vietnam War high for the fifth year in a row.

Though the record suicide rate cannot be traced to a single causal factor, specialists cite the psychological trauma of killing, an American culture of denial, financial difficulties, failed relationships, substance abuse, and post-traumatic stress disorder as main contributors to the trend.

Despite the five-year span, Army Vice Chief of Staff Peter Chiarelli admitted recently the US Army was still short the 300 substance abuse counselors and 800 behavioral specialists needed to cope with the problem.

Though the US military professes

concern for the psychological health of its service members, this personnel gap is just one example of the strong evidence to the contrary. The current recruiting tactics aimed at America’s youth are especially concerning. Not only do the very tactics that have been boosting recruitment sanitize war and create false expectations, they prey upon the vulnerable imaginations of children.

Throughout 2009 the military has aggressively expanded its marketing campaign targeting teenagers. Efforts include the release of Version 3 of the taxpayer-sponsored video game America’s Army, two graphic novels that look and read like comic books, and a unique 14,500-sq.-ft. arcade – or “Army Experience Center” – in a Philadelphia mall that is filled with simulators and shooter video games.

One reason for the armed forces’ recruiting success is the economic collapse and the ongoing jobs crisis. But this year’s record recruitment can only be fully understood in the context of the remarkable shift in tactics that began a decade ago.

In 1999, the military had its worst recruiting year in 30, and Congress called for “aggressive, innovative”

new approaches. Private-sector specialists were brought in, including the top advertising agency Leo Burnett, and the Army Marketing Brand Group was formed. A key aim of the new recruitment strategy was to ensure long-term success by cultivating the allegiance of teenage Americans.

Part of the new campaign, helping the post-9/11 recruiting bump, was the free video game America’s Army. Since its release, different versions of the war game have been downloaded more than 40 million times, enough to put it in the Guinness book of world records. According to a 2008 study by researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, “the game had more impact on recruits than all other forms of Army advertising combined.”

America’s Army targets 13-to-21-year-olds. The T for Teen rating was attained because designers were, as one Army spokesman said in 2002, “very careful on the blood thing.” Designers emphasize the game’s realism, but the game is only realistic on a superficial level. Their conception of authenticity consists of realistic movement, gun clips that fall away at the right speed, and night

vision goggles that make the same exact whir as the actual goggles do.

The Navy’s 10-page graphic novel, “Bravo Zulu,” aimed at minority high school students, was released in May. Its plot is as cartoonish as its sound effects: “KLANK,” “FZZZZZZZ,” “KA-KREEK,” “FZAAAAAAT.” The Army’s graphic novel, “Knowledge is Power,” was released in tandem with “America’s Army 3.” The graphic novel portrays a staff sergeant surviving an explosion unharmed. His exclamation to the rookie soldier who saved him implies that this shows it was wrong to be “worried about bein’ here!”

That these efforts are unfaithful to war’s reality has not gone unnoticed. Protesting the Army Experience Center in Philadelphia, Sgt. Jesse Hamilton, who served two tours in Iraq and nine total in the military, expressed disgust that the Army has “resorted to such a deceiving recruitment strategy.”

It’s an approach that could have detrimental long-term effects. “The video game generation is worse at distorting the reality” of war, according to one Air Force colonel. Although they may be more talent-

ed at operating predator drones, the colonel told the Brookings Institution, “They don’t have that sense of what [is] really going on.”

With the war in Iraq and America’s surge in Afghanistan, heavy deployment cycles will undoubtedly extend the military’s current “stress window.”

“This is not business as usual,” said Mr. Chiarelli of the “devastating” suicide rate.

To be sure, Vets from World War II and Vietnam had shell shock and PTSD without video game recruitment, but targeting teens with video games and graphic novels that ignore the psychological realities of war is not the way to solve the recruitment problem at a time when the psychological health of those who are sent to Afghanistan and Iraq should be a top priority. If recruiting goals can’t be met without employing these deceptive tactics, the military must do better at explaining just how current engagements protect American interests.

Jamie Holmes is a research associate at New America Foundation. Article published by the Christian Science Monitor

Climate Crisis Will Be the Challenge of New Decade

By Ois n Coghlan
Irish Times - December 31, 2009
<http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/opinion/2009/1231/1224261476380.html>

What will the decade ahead hold for the environment? Mankind has yet to meet the stark challenges posed by global warming, which will not go away.

This is not how it was supposed to end. Internationally, this decade was supposed to give us a comprehensive global treaty to contain climate change. In Ireland, some of us allowed ourselves hope that a soft-landing for the Celtic Tiger would herald a “post-materialist” era where environmental and social considerations were given as much weight as economic ones in policymaking. Instead, the Copenhagen climate talks ended in confusion and recrimination and in Ireland the economic crash has driven us back to very understandable materialist concerns about budget cuts and job losses.

The coming decade will see whether humanity is capable of overcoming a complex web of environmental problems that pose an existential threat to civilisation. Climate, the most urgent and most mainstream of these problems, epitomises the challenges.

Politicians and scientists agree we must limit global warming to less than two degrees Celsius to prevent runaway climate change. Current pollution trends put us on a path to six degrees of warming this century, when four degrees or more would trigger the breakdown of civilisation as we know it. To be closer to two degrees than four we need to make global emissions start to decline before 2020.

That is the challenge of the decade. When we are writing our reviews of the 2010s there will be no more telling benchmark of human progress. Are global greenhouse gas emissions lower in 2019 than they are now? Put another way, will we choose survival? To answer this most basic question successfully humankind will have to answer two subsidiary questions, one evolutionary, one political.

As a species are we evolved to tackle a threat like climate change?

It doesn’t seem to trigger our fight-or-flight reflex in a meaningful way. For most of us it seems remote and abstract. The gases that cause it are invisible. And the ultimate source of the threat is not external—it is us, our current lifestyles, our historical choices and our future aspirations.

However unwittingly, we are the root of the problem, and therefore the solution. If an army were massing on our borders, if an asteroid were hurtling towards Earth, no one would question the need to act. But as we set fire to the only home humanity has ever known, we struggle to perceive the threat and have so far failed to act decisively.

The second question is a practical, political one. Can an international system of 192 nation states solve a global problem? The lesson of Copenhagen is no, at least not if we cling to our traditional approach to interstate negotiating, where short-term national advantage trumps long-term public interest.

It is the tragedy of the commons writ large. For the vested interests in each state it makes sense for their country to keep polluting as much as possible and national negotiators act on that basis. Given the limited capacity of our common atmosphere to absorb that pollution, however, this approach will prove disastrous for humanity as a whole.

As the decade progresses there are three signs that would indicate we are moving beyond this “mutual assured destruction” approach to climate change. We need to see all three.

First, are any of the players acting unilaterally to cut their emissions, against their perceived short-term interests? The obvious candidate is the European Union, itself a unique political formation where national sovereignty is pooled and co-operation has replaced competition in crucial areas. The EU has made a unilateral commitment to action on climate change, but it is a weak one. When you account for the caveats and the loopholes it adds up to less than half our fair share. So, will we see EU climate policy start to reflect the union’s pioneering nature? Will the EU move to cut its emissions by 40 per cent by 2020, in line with the science?

The union could act on the cour-

age of its convictions. Those advocating the abolition of slavery did not say they would only free half their slaves until their competitors freed theirs. The EU could also act based on its long-term economic interest. A low-carbon economy will build energy security, resilience and sustainable jobs for the rest of the century.

China is acting to limit its future emissions, despite its determination not to be legally bound to do so. And the US is moving too, faster at state and company level than federal level. If the early years of this decade see these players significantly limit their emissions it will be both a sign of hope and an international confidence-building measure.

Second, will the emerging transnational forces gain the strength and focus to push nation states towards a global deal? The run-in to Copenhagen saw supranational civil society coalition-building reach new heights, with the likes of 350.org, Avaaz and the tcktck campaign mobilising hundreds of thousands of people across the world. Friends of the Earth alone had 500 activists in Copenhagen, representing our two million supporters across 77 countries. On the business side, lobbyists for polluting interests still hold the upper hand - but this time more than 500 transnational corporations signed a Copenhagen communique most of which could just as easily have been written by non-governmental organisation campaigners.

Third, will our governments manage to agree to a new treaty that provides a global framework for action and “mutual assured survival” rather than destruction? This is the key test. Can we lift our eyes to the horizon long enough to put aside short-term national advantage? This past decade there has been much talk of the G8, the G20 and now the G2, China and the US. But the new treaty must institutionalise the G1: humanity, and our common cause to protect the only ecosystem that supports our existence.

The coming decade will require you to decide where you stand, and soon.

Ois n Coghlan is director of Friends of the Earth.

Eco Etiquette: How Can I Avoid Genetically Modified Foods?

By Jennifer Grayson
Founding Editor of The Red, White, and Green

This week’s headline-grabbing news that agriculture giant Monsanto’s genetically modified corn was found to cause organ failure in rats is sure to send panicked shoppers into an anti-frankenfood frenzy. The good news is that this is precisely the kind of damning study (GM corn + animals = death) that will help bring to light the potentially catastrophic consequences of scientifically altered crops. The bad news is that even those who see that light will have a difficult time completely boycotting genetically modified organisms, or GMOs as they’ve come to be known.

That’s because GMOs aren’t just limited to the foods we eat; they’re also in the clothes we wear (cotton is one of the most prevalent GMO crops) and in the everyday household products we use. Those who buy giant jugs of distilled white vinegar to make DIY eco-friendly cleaning products might be interested to know that their vinegar may, in fact, be distilled from GMO corn. I say may, because if you live in the United States, there’s no proof that the products you buy or the food you serve your children hasn’t been genetically tampered with. While the EU, Japan, China, Korea, Australia, and New Zealand have labeling laws for GMO foods, there are no such requirements in the US, despite the fact that a 2008 CBS News poll found that an overwhelming 87 percent of Americans would like GMO foods to be labeled.

As usual, lawmakers are light-years behind the American consumer. And with a GM crop pioneer now firmly planted in the Obama administration as director of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, I’m not holding my breath for GMO crops to be restricted in the US anytime soon. Here’s how you can take charge in the meantime:

Buy organic. Under USDA guidelines, organic foods must be produced without bioengineering. Keep in mind, however, that for multi-ingredient or processed organic foods (counterintuitive though that may sound), the label organic means only that the product is at least 95 percent organic. Translation: While the tomatoes in that “organic” spaghetti sauce may, indeed, be organic, the soybean oil it contains may be from GMO crops. Play it safe by looking for products that are labeled 100 percent organic, and stick to unprocessed foods whenever possible.

If you can’t afford to buy everything organic, at least make sure that the animal products you purchase -- meat, dairy, eggs -- are. With conventional beef, for instance, you can be pretty sure that mountains of Round-up Ready corn were fed to those cows. That conventional zucchini? Not as looming a threat, at least where GMOs are concerned.

Beware the SCCC. No, it’s not some new government agency (though maybe it should be). That stands for soy, cotton, canola, and corn, which are among the most common GMO crops. The statistics are startling: 91 percent of soy, 87 percent of cotton, 75 percent of canola, and 73 percent of corn crops grown in the US are GMO, according to the USDA. So unless the label specifically says organic, you can pretty much bet that any food or product you buy that contains any of the big four have been genetically changed. We’re not just talking tofu and tortilla chips, either: It’s the sheets on your bed, those potato chips fried in cottonseed oil, and the aspartame in your Diet Coke (made using a fermentation process that involves soy and corn).

Avoid processed, packaged foods. Thanks to farming subsidies that have produced unimaginable surpluses of cheap (mostly GMO) corn, we now have dozens of corn-based ingredients served up to us in increasingly creative ways by the processed food industry. As Michael Pollan points out in The Omnivore’s Dilemma, “Corn is in the coffee whitener and Cheez Whiz, the frozen yogurt and TV dinner, the canned fruit and ketchup and candies, the soups and snacks and cake mixes...there are some 45,000 items in the average American supermarket and more than a quarter of them now contain corn.” Bottom line: If you’re concerned about GMOs, don’t eat anything with an advertising budget.

Check out the Non-GMO Shopping Guide. The site just launched last month, and offers more tips on how to avoid GMOs. The guide also includes lists of common name-brand foods that may contain them, as well as ones that are GMO-free.

Finally, the most important thing you can do, beyond voting with your dollars: Call your Congressperson to say that you want to see mandatory GMO labeling laws. If the jury is still out as to whether GMOs cause organ failure, then we shouldn’t have to play this guessing game every time we go to the supermarket.

Send all your eco-inquiries to Jennifer Grayson at eco.etiquette@gmail.com.



KING on page 11

creation program, strong investment in job training, an equity assessment of federal spending, and returning the tax system to one where those with the most concentrated wealth provide greater investment in the public good.

A rededication to King’s vision can redirect the United States back to the path of greater equality, and a stronger economy for the middle and working classes. Martin Luther King, Jr. didn’t believe in the trickle-down philosophy that has run our economy for the past three decades. Instead, his “liberation theology” analysis called for siding with and addressing specifically the challenges of the most disenfranchised to advance society as a whole.

History witnessed this strategy’s success with the results of the civil rights movement of the 1960s. All Americans—women, immigrants, the disabled, the elderly, the young

and the poor—benefited from the vast social programs and protections that resulted from that struggle. As the nation continues to heal from an economic and financial crisis caused by unregulated greed, we’ll find racial inequality unchanged and overall economic inequality at unprecedented heights. It’s time to finally make a unified thrust to bridge racial and economic inequality.

Dedrick Muhammad is a senior organizer and research associate at the Institute for Policy Studies, a progressive think tank that transforms ideas into action for peace, justice, and the environment. He is a co-author of “State of the Dream 2010: Drained—Jobless and Foreclosed; Pulling the Plug on Communities of Color,” a new report from the organization United for a Fair Economy.

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Farming, Food Fantasies and Recombinant Cuisine

By Astrid Webster

If you haven’t seen Food, Inc and plan to eat again in the foreseeable future, you probably should . You just might not want to, however; eat again, that is. It’s the perfect leadup for a New Year’s resolution to lose weight. It could be called the Think Before You Eat Diet.

If you want to slow the information about what America eats down a bit, reading Michael Pollan’s books is a good alternative. In Omnivore’s Dilemma, Pollan takes the reader on a literary tour of food from the nation’s farms to our tables. To say that it’s an unappetizing trip, save for the chapter on Polyface Farm, would be an understatement. Think school cafeteria food with none of the culinary niceties.

Pollan’s second book, In Defense of Food, takes on food science as it is practiced under the four horsemen of a capitalist orgy: mass production, corporate wealth at the expense of personal health, megamedia

conglomerates and people who are too busy or distracted by said media to notice what they are putting into their mouths. If we weren’t so busy buying misinformation, our savings accounts would be growing exponentially since there is so little in the US marketplace that truly enhances our lives. Most of it is simply another layer of distraction that keeps us from noticing how the meaning of our lives is slipping away.

Lierre Keith’s Vegetarian Myth is the capstone of understanding how far afield we have gone from understanding what we need to eat so we can simultaneously nourish our soil and our bodies. Ever since people began to consciously cultivate crops, we have tried to wrest more food than the world provides naturally. This forcing, as Keith calls it, has led to an increasing depletion of the Earth’s soil and consequent capacity to feed her growing masses. The solution has been to slice every soy bean, every

corn kernel and grain of wheat into so many slices or fractions that what we see is not nearly what we think we are getting. If you are of a mind that the emperor has no clothes, you might consider that what he is bringing to your plate is equally denuded.

News from the FDA that our palettes are increasingly seduced by yummys that are empty calories or are downright harmful only breaks the surface of the media’s glossy news once in a while as it recently did with the warnings against transfats. Sherry Rogers, MD has played Paul Revere to our nutrition and medical care for some time but few have ever heard of her. Think Andrew Weil, Jonathan Wright and Alan Gaby all rolled into one, so prolific a writer is she. To get an idea of her drift, consider titles like the Cholesterol Hoax, the Blood Pressure Hoax and Is Your Cardiologist Killing You. She is known throughout the world as a longevity and environmental health

expert but you have to hunt for her books or go to her own publisher to get them. She can also save your life, just as carefully reading the books listed above can.

Having steeped myself in topics such as the ones listed above and the ones I have been writing about here for the past year, I find myself feeling that we need a transition town mentality about the food we eat. If we need it to nourish us, and we do, we have to mount an effort similar to the victory gardens so many of our parents grew during World War II. Indeed, there is a WWII going on right now for our minds, our bodies and the future we should be leaving to our children. That reality is nowhere in sight unless we change how embedded our food is in our fuel cycle.

We cannot continue to replace all that is natural in the plants we eat and in the animals who eat them and are in turn eaten by us with synthetically produced food look-a-likes and expect a population

that is capable of demanding and supporting a real democracy. Most of us wouldn’t have a clue where to start but the answer is right under our noses. Toby Hemenway can tell you what to do with the soil you find there in his book, Gaia’s Garden. It is a delightful irony that the garden on the cover of his first edition is smack in the middle of Los Alamos. Eden in the heart of darkness, you might say. The newly released film Dirt also tells the truth about what lies underfoot. Food is central to the growing circle of violence that surrounds us; it can shrink once again if we treat our mother Earth as we should and let her provide food for us in a way that is natural rather than forced, tended by creatures that do most of the gardening for us if we render the respect that is their due.

Food, Inc. shows the violence embedded in the way food is brought to our tables. The violence that takes food from the tables of ‘developing’ nations is a topic for another day.

Health-Care Reform Won’t Cure this Sick System

By Martha Burk

Good riddance to 2009: the recession, the Wall Street bailouts, the main street misery, and most of all the so-called health-care “debate.” Now that the debacle is mostly over, for better or worse, we’d best turn our attention to the one factor driving up health-care costs in this country that hasn’t even been mentioned—the lack of paid sick leave.

While Congress was laboring to insure the insurance companies from loss of profits, almost 60,000 cases of swine flu were confirmed in the United States. The World Health Organization has declared the global situation a “public health emergency of international concern,” and says the epidemic is not over. Early on, the U.S. government increased distribution of antiviral drugs and ramped

up production of the H1N1 vaccine, and the Centers for Disease Control recommended that sick people stay home from work or school to avoid infecting others.

Right.

Everyone, including members of Congress, probably would say that’s good advice. But there’s one little problem. According to the Institute for Women’s Policy Research in Washington, fewer than half of U.S. workers get paid sick days. What’s worse, only a third of those who get the benefit are able to take their sick days to care for ill children. Workers who come into direct contact with the public, such as restaurant servers, childcare workers, and hotel employees, are among the least likely to have paid sick days. Many are low wage workers who not only lose wages if they stay home—they risk

losing their jobs.

It doesn’t take a rocket scientist to figure out that workers who lack paid sick time are more likely to go to work with a communicable illness, and parents who cannot stay home with a sick child are more likely to send them to school or day care to infect other kids. At the height of the flu outbreak, Mexico closed its schools—the first step that any public health service recommends at the onset of an epidemic. According to Dr. Jody Heymann, at the McGill Institute for Health and Social Policy, Mexico could do this because the country combines paid sick leave with child-care through its social insurance system. At least 139 other countries provide some paid sick leave to workers as a matter of national law.

Though some large companies do

it anyway, no U.S. laws—national or state—require that workers have paid sick days, meaning workers are at the mercy of corporate bureaucrats. So much for “the best health-care system in the world.”

Though the swine flu threat is lessening, winter isn’t over, and we still have many cases of seasonal flu ahead of us. The monetary cost to employers and families runs to the millions of dollars. It’s good that the Obama administration held press conferences and declared a public health emergency at the height of the crisis, but a far more serious—and continuing—emergency is the lack of sick leave. That propagates the virus as surely as food service workers sneezing into your food because they’re too poor or too scared for their jobs to stay home.

The Healthy Families Act, which

requires that paid sick time be provided by employers with fifteen or more employees, is likely to be back on the table in Congress sometime in the next couple of months. And unlike the division over health insurance, the country is together on this one. Four out of five Americans think paid sick days should be a basic labor standard.

Pundits say this is a time politically to leave the dogfights of 2009 behind and go for some big ideas. Clearly, this is one idea whose time is long past due.

Martha Burk is a political psychologist, women’s issues expert, and director of the Corporate Accountability Project for the National Council of Women’s Organizations (NCWO). This article appears in Minuteman-media.org

Values of Health Care Stocks Increase Fearlessly as Public Option Is Dead

By Representative Dennis Kucinich, D-Ohio

Wall Street Celebrates Senate’s “Significantly Watered Down” Health Care Bill

Wall Street is celebrating “Health Care Reform.” According to an industry insider report yesterday by MarketWatch (Gibson and Britt) health care stocks rallied as the bill

moved through the Senate, particularly since there is no public option in the bill to compete or compare with insurance company rate-making.

“Health care investors find themselves having confronted their greatest fear, and, while there will be legislation, it will be significantly watered down ...” said Mike O’Rourke, chief market strategist at BTIG LLC. As a result, shares of Aetna gained 4.7%, while Cigna rose 3.9%. United

Health and Wellpoint “rallied to 52-week highs.”

Once the bill becomes law, insurance companies will gain at least 26 million new customers and as much as \$50 billion in new annual revenue from private-pay and from government subsidies as people will be required by law to purchase private insurance. While certain expenses are capped in the bill, it appears that premium costs are not.

The Senate’s move prompted Gregory Nersessian of Credit Suisse to raise his price targets [predicting greater strength of stock performance] on seven insurers: Aetna, Cigna, Amerigroup Corp., Humana Inc., Molina Healthcare Inc., UnitedHealth Group Inc. and Wellcare Health Plans Inc.

“... the [bill] is a positive first step” Nersessian said in a note to clients. “The heavy lifting will come when

Congress is forced to slow the rate of medical cost growth through more aggressive payment restrictions and utilization controls down the road,” he said - meaning that this particular industry insider is predicting limitations on benefits.

Marketwatch also wrote that none of the new standards on how much the industry must spend on medical expenses will “impose great hardship on any insurers.”

US Census to Hire Thousands in New Mexico

By Janet Bridgers

US Census operations will hire thousands of people in New Mexico to fill temporary part-time positions beginning in late January.

Most of those hired will be census takers (enumerators) who will knock on doors throughout their community to interview residents and help them to complete census forms. Work will take place evenings and weekends. The short-term jobs offer good pay, flexible hours, paid training, and reimbursement for authorized work-related expenses, such as mileage incurred while conducting census work. Those hired must gener-

ally have a valid driver’s license and provide their own transportation, though some exceptions are made.

Those interested should immediately call 866 861 2010—the Census Jobs Line—to apply and sign up for testing. Testing consists of 28 multiple choice questions to be taken within 30 minutes. It can be taken more than once and a practice test may be obtained from the local office or seen online. Those who have applied before and been tested should also call to verify their status.

For more information, telephone 866-861-2010, google “CensusJobs,” or go <http://2010.census.gov/2010censusjobs>.

