

connections

PRICELESS

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SAVE THE DATES

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WALDO CONSERVANCY
FESTIVAL**

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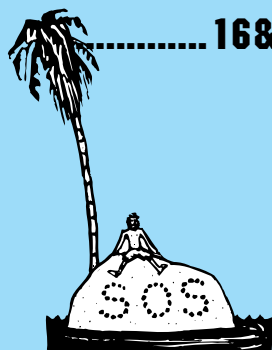
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A new progressive majority for the Stockton City Council?

Eric Parfrey

2008 will go down as the year when California voters are asked to troop to the polls three times: once for the early Presidential primary on Super Tuesday February 3; in November for the general election to decide whether the country will endorse a third Bush term in the form of John McCain or pick a Democratic Party alternative; and in between, a largely overlooked election on June 3, when mostly local candidates and two important State initiatives are on the ballot.

It's a shame that the June 3rd election will be largely ignored by three-quarters of the voters, since here in Stockton we are on the verge of a major (and possibly earthshaking) change in the Council majority that could usher in a new progressive political majority for the first time in modern history.

In Stockton, there is a lively competition among about a half dozen candidates to succeed Mayor Ed Chavez, who unexpectedly decided not to run at the end of 2007. The front-runners (based on electoral history and money raised) seem to be former Councilwoman Ann Johnston; current Councilman Clem Lee, and termed-out County Supervisor Steve Gutierrez. (Disclosure: I have worked for and contributed to the Johnston campaign.) Those not automatically appointed, but also running, are former Councilman

Ralph Lee White, community volunteer Woody Alspaugh and student Motecuzoma Patrick Sanchez. Assuming none of these receives a majority, the two top vote-getting candidates will go to the November election for the final decision.

Three other Stockton Council seats are up for grabs and none of the contests includes an incumbent. The two top vote getters in each district will proceed to a citywide election in November, under Stockton's strange hybrid form of district/citywide council elections.

In District 4 (central Stockton), third-generation resident and attorney Chris Eley is facing off against Diane Lowery, who lost in the last 2004 Council race against Clem Lee, when both received strong developer backing. In District 6 (south Stockton), former Councilman and business owner Mark Stebbins is running against Rev. Wayne Richardson and Manteca school board member Dale Frichten. And in District 2 (north-central Stockton), former Downtown Alliance director Kathy Miller is in a field that includes former football star Mike Merriweather and Kevin Welch, a relative unknown who may receive the developers' blessings.

In addition, a fourth Council slot (District 1, north Stockton) will no doubt be vacated in January when current Councilman Steve



Bestolarides moves on to the San Joaquin County Board of Supervisors; that position will be filled by an appointment.

Thus, when the dust settles at the end of this year, five of the seven current City Council seats may very well be filled with new faces, and those new representatives could include at least three or four individuals with explicitly

progressive good-government political agendas. Coupled with Councilwoman Susan Eggman, we could be looking at a new Council majority that would effectively replace the good ol' boy, pro-development regime that has dominated the city for the last several decades.

So, any of you voters interested to vote now?

City Council may change but not the Board of Supes

Eric Parfrey

While we could be on the verge of a new progressive Stockton council majority, the San Joaquin Board of Supervisors seems to be heading in the opposite direction. It's a shame. A hoped for three-vote majority that could have opened up the Board during the 1990s to new ideas and policies failed when

Stockton Councilman Vic Mow joined solid progressives Dario Marengo and Steve Gutierrez. But Mow quickly abandoned those local activists who had supported his campaign and became a safe pro-developer vote. Sometimes its hard to pick your allies.

The stodgy status quo of the
(continued page 3)

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Wake up...and raise taxes

Bruce Giudici

Which is a bigger drain on the economy: energy and health care costs or taxes?

The message of no new taxes (on the rich) has destroyed the ability of this country and state to collectively solve long-term problems of health care, decaying roads and bridges, a sub-par educational system—while allowing the gap between the ultra-rich and poor to widen to record proportions. Proposition 13, which enriched a small group of pre-1979 California property owners, has created a dysfunctional California taxation system that overrelies on fluctuating personal income and sales taxes. For the latest State budget "crisis" (similar to that which Republicans used to recall Gray Davis a few years back), the solution is to cut school spending and increase taxes on the poor (increasing sales taxes, borrowing against lottery funds). Wrong and wrong.

At some point, economists must remind people what taxes do: taxes merely re-distribute existing money that people have earned. Transferring money from the rich (who can't spend all they have) to those with lower incomes (who have to spend to survive) stimulates the economy—increasing demand. Paying higher energy and health care costs do the opposite—transfer money from lower income workers (who must buy gas and health insurance to survive) to the rich (oil, drug and health insurance companies, all who are making record profits). So right now, we have some choices to make.

While the rich will say that increasing taxes will decrease their incentive to work harder (thus lowering their incomes and tax revenues), there is no evidence of this. Historically, in times of economic trouble, taxes have been raised on the rich. In 1918, during the First World War, the

top Federal marginal tax rate was 77%; in from 1931 to 1932, it went from 25% to 63% (no wonder the rich disliked Roosevelt); and from 1951 through 1963, it remained at 91%. Did the rich suffer? No, because more money was put into the hands of those who bought their products. All boats rose with the tide.

Now, the top marginal tax rate is 35%—with 15% on capital gains (on stock sales that the rich have the most of), moving toward a 0% inheritance tax—so that the ultra rich can lock in their gains. Meanwhile, debt spirals (to be paid by our kids), services and investments are cut (schools, health care, housing—you name it), and money is squandered on projects with no use (nuclear weapons) or malign use (the military in general).

It is time for the majority in

Bruce Giudici, editor



this country to wake up. We have been sold a bill of goods. When we automatically reject increasing taxes out of hand—as we have been taught by the (rich) powers that be—we create the problems we should be solving. Remember those (re-distributed) "taxes" won't be coming back to our community in the form of public works projects, hiring of teachers and the like. Instead, those "taxes" we have no control over—energy and health care costs—suck money from our communities into the hands of the wealthy who profit off our misery. It's time to solve our problems, paying as we go.

Likely voters get hit

Eric Parfrey

There are at least two interesting trends to date (mid-May) in the June primary election in Stockton: serious candidates seem to be deliberately targeting high propensity voters only, and local unions are weighing in for the first time with regional unions in coordinated, multiple-mailing hit pieces.

First, the San Joaquin Registrar of Voters is expecting that the turnout on June 3rd could be an anemic 25%, meaning only one-quarter of all registered (not eligible, that's a bigger number) voters will bother to cast ballots. In contrast, the presidential shoot-out in November could be in the range of a 55% turn out.

So, the name of the game for those candidates running for local office on June 3rd is to target "high propensity" voters: those couples or individuals who vote absentee or go the polls religiously.

The other, perhaps not surprising, trend for this June 2008 race is the emergence of coordinated hit pieces launched against at least two of the local candidates by a group of labor unions. As of

mid-May, three separate mailers have ended up in this high-propensity voter's mailbox. All three are clever broadsides that take on pro-business candidates Gary Giovanetti and Clem Lee, running for Supervisor and Mayor, respectively.

Two of the pieces charge that both men, when sitting on the Stockton Council, voted to "waste \$2.5 million in taxpayers dollars" to subsidize a downtown restaurant—clearly a reference to the Paragaray's deal. The other mailer states that Giovanetti is "the wrong performer for Stockton" because he voted for the ill-fated one million dollar Neil Diamond concert that launched the downtown arena opening (a move by the former disgraced city manager, Mark Lewis, which ended up getting him fired. Giovanetti was the lone person on the council who opposed the firing).

The hit pieces were paid for by six unions: United Food Commercial Workers Local 8; SEIU-United Health Workers; SEIU Local 1021; Teamster Local 439; Operating Engineers Local 3; and Machinist Local 1546.



Board of Supes (continued from page 1)

current SJ County Board of Supervisors, which is generally pro-development while trying to be pro-agriculture, will not be changed by the results of the June 2008 election. Conservative Tracy dairyman Leroy Ornellas created Richard Pombo in the early 1990s and, although Pombo is gone, Ornellas will be easily swept back into office, challenged by Tom Benigno in District 5.

The anticipated election of Stockton Councilman Steve Bestolarides to the Board in District 3 (north Stockton-Brookside-Manteca-Lathrop) could come as early as the June election. While Bestolarides has a much more informed and nuanced view of development

and special interests than the other board members, his addition is expected to have little effect on how the County Supes go about their business, as he replaces Victor Mow.

And in District 1 (Central Stockton), former Stockton Councilman Gary Giovanetti is trying again to capture that seat, which for the last two decades has been held by progressives. Termed-out Supervisor Gutierrez' top aide Carlos Villapadua is vying to replace him, but some are worried that his lackluster campaign may be no match for Giovanetti's big bucks. Regardless who wins the District 1 race, this board will be just more of the same.

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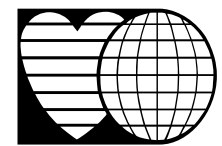
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"The Peace and Justice Network is a nonprofit educational organization committed to the vision of a world in which the equality of all persons is achieved, basic needs are met, conflict is resolved nonviolently, and the earth's resources are shared responsibly for the well-being of all her inhabitants and all future generations."

Military in our schools

Tyler Harbison

Walking among us at school are military recruiters. At my school, Amos Alonzo Stagg High, the recruiters give presentations, do activities at lunch, talk one-on-one with students, and are present in our school rallies. Seeing and experiencing all this, here is the picture that is painted:

The military offers structure. It provides food, shelter, and a future. They pay you, pay for college and ensure a successful future. Some have even gone as far as to guarantee a successful future.

Sadly, these presentations are one-sided. There are hardly any honest or open discussions about the pros and cons of military life. There are facts that are not being talked about: a fact such as the pay rate of a newly enlisted private being \$3.38/hour. College is attended only with your commanding officer's permission, and college is secondary in priority to military duty. That means that at any time, the military can interrupt your schooling to do

their bidding. No mention at all is given to the psychological and physical problems that arise in basic training. Enlisted personnel undergo humiliation and degrading treatment that trains the person to be able to kill and follow any instruction without emotion, opinion or question. We here at school aren't told that if you change your mind about being in the military after enlistment, either you give up your free will of what you want to do with your life (suck it up and stay in the military), face a dishonorable discharge, or even military jail. Dishonorable discharge has many post-service stigmas that stay with you.

Worst of all, there is the total avoidance of the issues around Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and how they apply to military experiences. PTSD is a disorder that affects people that have experienced an event that was either traumatic or disastrous. In a study by the Department of Veterans' Affairs, 20% of 168,528 veterans have PTSD.



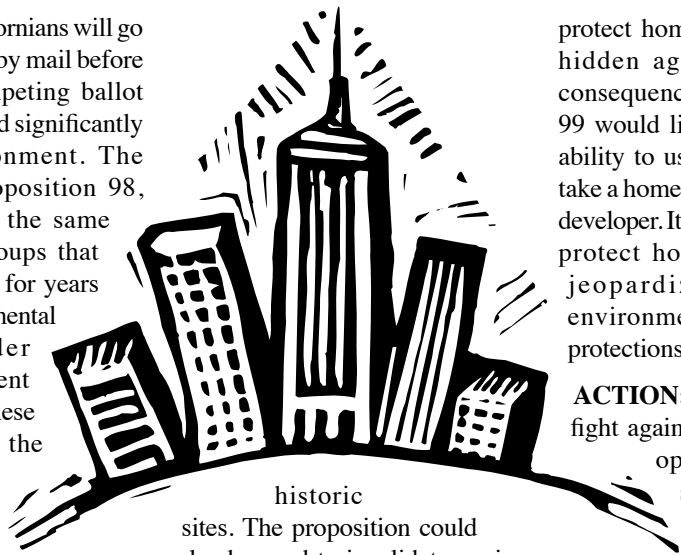
It is my hope that you, the people of the community, realize that there are recruiters in our schools that are manipulating students. It is also my hope that we as a community rise up and make efforts to put military recruiters and enlistment personnel out of our schools and away from unknowledgeable students who don't know both sides to the military picture.

Tyler can be contacted at bathoryxariax@yahoo.com

Yes on 99, no on 98

On June 3rd Californians will go to the polls (or vote by mail before then) for two competing ballot initiatives that would significantly affect the environment. The first of these, Proposition 98, was generated by the same property rights groups that have been working for years to wipe out environmental protections under the guise of eminent domain reform. (These groups sponsored the environmentally destructive Prop 90 in 2006, which Californians wisely defeated.)

Proposition 98 could prohibit a wide array of environmental regulations and land-use decisions. If passed, Prop 98 could limit enactment of necessary environmental protections, including those that reduce global warming pollution or protect coastal areas, old growth forests, farmland, ranchland, endangered species and their habitats, and cultural and



historic sites. The proposition could also be used to invalidate zoning that limits the development of polluting industries and "big box" megastores. Not only does Prop 98 threaten environmental laws, it would eliminate rent control and other renter protections, including the fair return of rental deposits and 60-day notice requirements for evictions.

The alternative to Prop 98 is Proposition 99—a real eminent domain reform measure that would

protect homeowners without the hidden agendas and adverse consequences of Prop 98. Prop 99 would limit the government's ability to use eminent domain to take a home to transfer to a private developer. It would constitutionally protect homeowners, without jeopardizing California's environmental laws or renter protections.

ACTION: Get involved in the fight against Prop 98. NRDC is opposing Prop 98 and supporting Prop 99, and we need your help to spread the word. Low voter turnout is expected for this election and California's environment cannot afford to have Prop 98 pass. Go to <http://www.no98yes99.com/> to find out more about these competing propositions and to learn how you can get involved.

Source: NRDC's Earth Action release, 5/9/08 Natural Resources Defense Council, 40 West 20th St, NY, NY 10011 212-727-4511 <http://www.nrdc.org>



MSM = truth? Check out the alternatives & decide for yourself

If you tap in to some of the alternative media, you will get a very different perspective on events. Especially now, when the mainstream media often acts as a cheerleader for whatever the administration does, it's necessary to go a little further to get your news. An internet connection is helpful.

KPFA (94.1 FM) provides the best coverage around for many issues. You can listen on the internet at <http://www.kpfa.org>

Democracy Now! on KPFA, 94.1 FM at 9am, on KVMR, 89.5 at 7pm or on the web at: <http://www.democracynow.org>

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The Guardian <http://www.guardian.co.uk/worldlatest/>

Angry Arab News Service <http://www.angryarab.blogspot.com/>

Corporate Watch <http://www.corpwatch.org/home/PHH.jsp>

We're on the web too!

The Peace & Justice Network of San Joaquin County (pjnsjc) website has information, calendar, media links, and more. Under construction and growing. Share your ideas on how the website should evolve.

<http://www.pjnsjc.org>

"Year of Health Reform": Take Two

Sen. Sheila Kuehl

It's been over a year since Governor Schwarzenegger decided to join the decades-long debate on health reform, and I'm actually quite pleased that he's indicated he will continue to focus on health reform in the years remaining in his administration. It may not have been clear to the Governor, but we always knew that the sheer magnitude of the needed reforms would take more than just one year to achieve. Any success to be gained on his "second try," however, will require a very different approach, both in terms of policy and in terms of politics.

Predictably, a number of interests in Sacramento have

attempted to characterize the failure of the Governor's and the Speaker's bill as the victim of uncompromising single payer proponents on the left and powerful insurance companies on the right, as though the Governor's plan was "just right" in a three-bears, middle of two-extremes, spin. In fact, the Governor's plan appropriately fell because of the Governor's own reluctance to make the difficult policy decisions necessary for the plan to be in any way affordable to the state as well as to businesses and individuals, but which would have stirred up strong opposition from insurance companies.

Simply put, insurance companies will not support any plan that would prevent them from

continuing to raise premiums 2-3 times faster than wages, limits that must be imposed in order for any long term financing to work. In the positive column, the Governor's plan included a number of reforms needed, if insurance companies were to be retained, that would have regulated (read wrestled) them into good behavior. It required insurers to accept all patients, to spend a minimum amount on actual care, and to refrain from singling out sick patients for unaffordably high premiums.

Not affordable

Unfortunately, it contained nothing that would have made premiums affordable for the vast majority of Californians, all of whom would have been required by the law to buy health insurance. The "subsidies" contained in the plan were only for very low income families (not a bad thing) and, except for those at the very poor end of the scale, would have partially subsidized premiums but left families to pay whatever co-pays and deductibles were set by the companies.

It's also worthwhile to refresh everyone's memory that labor unions and health care advocates who ostensibly "supported" the Governor's compromise plan did not register a support position with the Senate Health Committee, but rather indicated they supported the bill only if it were amended. The requested amendments, which were lengthy and substantive, were rejected by the Governor and the vaunted "support" was actually no support at all.

(If you are interested in seeing the support if amended section of the health committee analysis, go to http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/07-08/bill/asm/ab_0001-0050/abx1_1_cfa_20080125_153139_sen_comm.html It's a very long analysis, and the support if amended section begins on page 94).

If there is any clear lesson to be gained, it's that any large reform (single payer or other) must directly take on the insurance companies and must protect consumers against skyrocketing premiums and out of pocket

expenses. Anything short of that is fatally doomed, both politically and in practice.

On the Recent Field Poll

A recent Field Poll has been characterized, by the sound-bite pundits, as concluding that a majority of Californians would have supported the "major provisions of his proposal". This is a mistaken conclusion.

First, it assumes that the field poll questions presented the major provisions of the plan, both pro and con, which it did not. The poll did not ask, for example, whether respondents favored mandating individuals to purchase private health insurance without limiting how much premiums could grow each year. This means that the poll results regarding the Governor's plan are of limited use in assessing how respondents would have voted had the proposal been brought to the voters in a statewide election.

Interestingly the same Field poll showed that the California Nurses Association have the highest favorable rating for their role in the debate, a great deal higher than any other person or organization involved. The nurses are rightly seen by the public as fighting to protect the interests of patients, which, in this debate, involved opposing the Governor's plan and explaining why single payer meets the needs of consumers and the state without the problems raised by the Governor's plan.

Even as the Governor tiptoes around offending insurance companies, the Field poll reveals just how much the public is fed up with them--no surprise considering their recent legal troubles for rescinding coverage when patients get sick as well as systematically improperly denying needed care. Couple these transgressions with the steady gutting of benefits and increasing of cost sharing, all the while grossly inflating premiums, and it's easy to understand the public outrage. While insurers pretend they are taking these actions in order to contain costs, they have been painfully slow to take those steps that have been proven to improve health outcomes and save money, like chronic disease management, preventive

medicine, and investing in health information technologies.

What has not been widely reported is that the Field poll actually found significantly diminished support for employer sponsored health insurance, and lower support for "individual responsibility" since the last poll in 2006. In contrast, the poll documented a surge of 9 full percentage points in support of "Government Provided Health Care", which is one of the more unfavorable descriptions of single payer, and which does not even present the fact that, under single-payer, health care would continue to be privately delivered, while being funded publicly through premiums shared by government, employers and individuals.

Most importantly for us, the Field poll shows that the investment by single payer advocates in steady community organizing and education is paying off big time. Since 2002, universal health care advocates have rallied around Senate Bill 840 (Kuehl) the California Universal Health Care Act. These advocates have formed the OneCareNow coalition, made up of hundreds of supporting organizations around the state. The coalition has prioritized community education about universal health care and sponsored hundreds of public educational events throughout the year, and they are just getting started.

The unmistakable trend toward single payer is documented by other polls, including a recent survey of U.S. physicians that found a 10 percentage point jump since 2002 in support for government legislation to establish national health insurance.

There you have it. Two years of health reform with the Governor in the spotlight has resulted in a 9 percentage point jump in favor of single payer and diminished support for other policy options. Single payer supporters have always known that the more people think about health reform, the more they support single payer. We are winning.

Source: News release from Sen. Sheila Kuehl, 5/8/08. For more information, contact Senator.Kuehl@outreach.senate.ca.gov



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Why not health care: labor's view

Jeff Crosby

Andy, an IUE-CWA Local 201 member, looked at his pension check from General Electric as he sat in my office at the union hall. The local vice president and the president of the retirees association usually respond to benefit questions like this. But they were both on vacation, and I was struggling to catch up and be of some help.

"I got the \$40 raise you told us about in December" he told me. "Then in January, I lost it again, plus another \$6. What good was it? What happened?"

A conference call or two later, and we both knew three things had happened. In December, his pension went up \$40. In January, his health care went up \$46. So when the dust settled, his pension check dropped by \$6. And keep in mind that he is one of the lucky ones: The share of employees offering any group health insurance at all to their retired workers dropped from 66 percent in 1988 to 33 percent in 2007.

We fight and fight, but health care costs are killing us. And you can't bargain your way out of this mess. Understandably, getting the labor movement on the same page on a specific plan to fix health care is no easy task. I can't even get all the local unions in my labor council to support the same person for school committee!

Still, we hope for another chance for health care reform in January 2009 if we do well in the elections this fall. The buzzwords are flying for health care reform: "Secure," "Affordable," "Universal" and "Quality."

The "universal" part will peel off a Republican or two. They just think that people make bad health care choices; it's their fault if have lousy health care. As some mainstream economists would have it, bad choices in the health care market by uneducated consumers are the root of the problem.

The problem is this: Practically everyone uses the same words when they talk about reforming health care. What elected official is against "secure, affordable, quality" health care? If you use



buzzwords that are that broad, or a list of good principles 70 words long, you leave a lot of wiggle room for the next president and Congress to provide lousy answers under the same umbrella. Principles and buzzwords can mean a lot of things to a lot of people.

Be specific

We have to be very sharp to make an impact.

First, we have to identify what we are for specifically. The best laws, like Kennedy-Dingle that would expand Medicare to those between ages 55-65 and children under 20, and the Conyers single payer bill (H.R. 676) that would overhaul health insurance completely, are included in our AFL-CIO campaign. Even the proposal to expand Medicare has problems, since in its current, increasingly privatized form, Medicare costs themselves are increasing rapidly. The single-payer approach should be upfront; anything short of that we can deal with later, if necessary, as a compromise.

Second, we have to take head-on the issue of "government" control of health care. We can expect the right wing and health care profiteers to fund a zillion ads suggesting that some government apparatchik will be snuffling through our medicine cabinet and yanking IV's from our Aunt Ethel—even if we say we are talking about government in a "watchdog" role and not "in control."

The right wing is not moved by fine distinctions, and being on the defensive won't help us. It's either

the government or the insurance companies and drug companies that make the rules and run health care. And the latter have to get out.

Government can't be the enemy

I know, people are wary of big government. The problem of rebuilding support for the public sector in general as a campaign for the public good is more than I can go into here, but it's arguably the key task of the labor movement today. Sure, building trades folks have problems with the city inspectors when they do side jobs. A buddy of mine got screwed by the zoning board when he tried to remodel his garage. It has taken my brother months to figure out the "Aid and Attendance" benefit from the VA for my dad. Nobody wants to pay taxes, and everybody thinks the governor and the mayor (apparently all of the mayors, everywhere) and his buddies are ripping us off.

On the other hand, we know that 82 percent of union members want government to do more on health care. So we think conflicting things, side by side. It's called confusion. The answer to confusion is clarity, even if it takes a while to get there. It is suggested that if we are asked if we support something like the Canadian health care system, we denounce the question as scare tactics. Yet even an article by Stanley Greenberg in the American Prospect last June says: "A majority goes so far as to say it's time to establish a Canadian-style health care system." If a majority of the American people already support it, why should

those of us fighting for health care reform not defend it?

According to our own research, three times as many people think health care in Sweden is better than ours, as compared to those who think we have a better system than Sweden. Sounds like a rejection of the market-driven health care flop in favor of those Volvo-driving socialists.

Give me a chance to argue the gov'mint against the insurance companies and drug companies, and I'll deliver you the majority every time.

In a catastrophic illness, the insurance companies are appreciated. But I fought my insurance company for five months to get them to pay for treatment of my son's broken collarbone when he fell snow-boarding at Sunday River in Vermont—the last two months because they would not pay for \$5 worth of ibuprofen. I fought my insurance company again when they wanted me to pay for my wife's mammogram out of my own pocket. The hospital gave the insurance company the wrong Social Security number for my wife (even though she used to work there), and by the time they corrected it, the insurance company said the bill was submitted too late. So the hospital put collection agencies on me. These were high-level negotiations. As in, "Hey, have you ever broken your collarbone? Well, IT HURTS!"

People like Andy get a little cranky when William Van Faasen, CEO of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts, walks off with \$16.4 million in retirement benefits...and then, oops,

doesn't quite retire after all and continues to pull down \$3 million a year in salary and bonuses as chairman. And we call BC/BS a "nonprofit."

Quality health care? The American Academy of Dermatology reported you can get an appointment for Botox to get rid of those pesky wrinkles on your face in eight days; but it takes more than three times as long to find someone to evaluate a potentially cancerous mold on the third wrinkle from the left. Free-market health care follows the money. And the insurance companies only want to offer health care to people who don't need it. Is this some kind of a revelation?

The next time your prescription drug co-pay creeps up, remember that the drug companies are making three times the profit rate of the average corporation. Still want your co-pay to foot the bill for the 80,000 full-time salesmen who knock on doctors' doors to offer incentives to push the latest pill?

Medical free-market efficiency has one hand in my pocket and the other on my throat. I don't need another focus group; I need a Louisville slugger.

We're trying to break out of the neo-liberal box of privatization, deregulation and free trade that has been choking us for the last several decades. There is no ducking the argument of government control vs. market-based health care. There's no shortcut. Health care is not just another commodity.

This is a street fight. We can win, even if it's not in January. And sooner or later, we have to win this one.

Note: IUE-CWA Local 201 and other IUE-CWA locals struck to defend health care benefits at this Lynn [Mass.] GE plant and across the country.





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Attacking Iran means impeachment

[Editor's note: Rep. John Conyers, Jr, House Judiciary Committee Chair, is gathering support to send the following letter to the President.]

The Honorable George W. Bush
President of the United States
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We are writing to register our strong opposition to possible unilateral, preemptive military action against other nations by the Executive Branch without Congressional authorization. As you know, Article I, Section 8 of the U.S. Constitution grants Congress the power "to declare war," to lay and collect taxes to "provide for the common defense" and general welfare of the United States, to "raise and support armies," to "provide and maintain a navy," to "make rules for the regulation for the land and naval forces," to "provide for calling forth the militia to execute the laws of the Union, suppress insurrections and repel invasions," to "provide for organizing, arming, and disciplining, the militia," and to "make all laws necessary and proper for carrying into execution ... all ... powers vested by this Constitution in the Government of the United States." Congress is also given exclusive power over the purse. The Constitution says, "No money shall be drawn from the Treasury but in consequence of appropriations made by law."

By contrast, the sole war powers granted to the Executive Branch through the President can be found in Article II, Section 2, which states, "The President shall be the Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy of the United States, and of the Militia of the several States, when called into actual Service of the United States."

Nothing in the history of the "Commander-in-Chief" clause suggests that the authors of the provision intended it to grant the Executive Branch the authority to engage U.S. forces in military action whenever and wherever it sees fit without any prior authorization from Congress. In our view, the

founders of our country intended this power to allow the President to repel sudden attacks and immediate threats, not to unilaterally launch, without congressional approval, preemptive military actions against foreign countries. As former Republican Representative Mickey Edwards recently wrote, "[t]he decision to go to war ... is the single most difficult choice any public official can be called upon to make. That is precisely why the nation's Founders, aware of the deadly wars of Europe, deliberately withheld from the executive branch the power to engage in war unless such action was expressly approved by the people themselves, through their representatives in Congress."

Members of Congress, including the signatories of this letter, have previously expressed concern about this issue. On April 25, 2006, sixty-two Members of Congress joined in a bipartisan letter that called on you to seek congressional approval before making any preemptive military strikes against Iran. Fifty-seven Members of Congress have co-sponsored H. Con. Res. 33, which expresses the sense of Congress that the President should not initiate military action against Iran without first obtaining authorization from Congress.

Our concerns in this area have been heightened by more recent events. The resignation in mid-March of Admiral William J. "Fox" Fallon from the head of U.S. Central Command, which was reportedly linked to a magazine article that portrayed him as the only person who might stop your Administration from waging preemptive war against Iran, has renewed widespread concerns that your Administration is unilaterally planning for military action against that country. This is despite the fact that the December 2007 National Intelligence Estimate concluded that Iran had halted its nuclear weapons program in the fall of 2003, a stark reversal of previous Administration assessments.

As we and others have continued to review troubling legal memoranda and other materials

from your Administration asserting the power of the President to take unilateral action, moreover, our concerns have increased still further. For example, although federal law is clear that proceeding under the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) "shall be the exclusive means by which electronic surveillance" can be conducted within the U.S. for foreign intelligence purposes, 18 U.S.C. 2511(2)(f), the Justice Department has asserted that the National Security Agency's warrantless wiretapping in violation of FISA is "supported by the President's well-recognized inherent constitutional authority as Commander in Chief and sole organ for the Nation in foreign affairs". As one legal expert has explained, your Administration's "preventive paradigm" has asserted "unchecked unilateral power" by the Executive Branch and violated "universal prohibitions on torture, disappearance, and the like."

Late last year, Senator Joseph Biden stated unequivocally that "the president has no authority to unilaterally attack Iran, and if he does, as Foreign Relations Committee chairman, I will move to impeach" the president.

We agree with Senator Biden, and it is our view that if you do not obtain the constitutionally required congressional authorization before launching preemptive military strikes against Iran or any other nation, impeachment proceedings should be pursued. Because of these concerns, we request the opportunity to meet with you as soon as possible to discuss these matters. As we have recently marked the fifth year since the invasion of Iraq, and the grim milestone of 4,000 U.S. deaths in Iraq, your Administration should not unilaterally involve this country in yet another military conflict that promises high costs to American blood and treasure.

Sincerely,
John Conyers, Jr.
Chairman, House Judiciary Committee

Source: Truthout 5/8/08 <http://www.truthout.org/>

The truth about veteran suicides

Aaron Glantz

Eighteen American war veterans kill themselves every day. One thousand former soldiers receiving care from the Department of Veterans Affairs attempt suicide every month. More veterans are committing suicide than are dying in combat overseas. These are statistics that most Americans don't know, because the Bush administration has refused to tell them. Since the start of the Iraq War, the government has tried to present it as a war without casualties.

In fact, they never would have come to light were it not for a class action lawsuit brought by Veterans for Common Sense and Veterans United for Truth on behalf of the 1.7 million Americans who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan. The two groups allege the Department of Veterans Affairs has systematically denied mental health care and disability benefits to veterans returning from the conflict zones.

The case, officially known as Veterans for Common Sense vs. Peake, went to trial last month at a Federal Courthouse in San Francisco. The two sides are still filing briefs until May 19 and waiting for a ruling from Judge Samuel Conti, but the case is already having an impact. That's because over the course of the two week trial, the VA was compelled to produce a series of documents that show the extent of the crisis effecting wounded soldiers.

Shh!

"Shh!" begins one e-mail from Dr. Ira Katz, the head of the VAs Mental Health Division, advising a media spokesperson not to tell CBS News that 1,000 veterans receiving care at the VA try to kill themselves every

month. "Our suicide prevention coordinators are identifying about 1,000 suicide attempts per month among the veterans we see in our medical facilities. Is this something we should (carefully) address ourselves in some sort of release before someone stumbles on it?" the e-mail concludes.

Leading Democrats on the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee immediately called for Katz's resignation. On May 6, the Chair of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs, Bob Filner (D-CA), convened a hearing titled The Truth About Veterans Suicides and called Katz and VA Secretary James Peake to testify.

That e-mail was in poor tone but the content was part of a dialogue about what we should do about new information, Katz said in response to Filner's questions. The e-mail represents a healthy dialogue among members of VA staff about when it's appropriate to disclose and make public information early in the process. Filner was not satisfied and accused Katz and Peake of a cover-up.

"We should all be angry about what has gone on here," Filner said. "This is a matter of life and death for the veterans that we are responsible for and I think there was criminal negligence in the way this was handled. If we do not admit, assume or know then the problem will continue and people will die. If that's not criminal negligence, I don't know what is."

A pattern

It's also part of a pattern. The high number of veteran suicides weren't the only government statistics the Bush Administration was forced to reveal because of the class action lawsuit. Another set of documents presented in court

showed that in the six months leading up to March 31, a total of 1,467 veterans died waiting to learn if their disability claim would be approved by the government. A third set of documents showed that veterans who appeal a VA decision to deny their disability claim have to wait an average of 1,608 days, or nearly four and a half years, for their answer.

Other casualty statistics are not directly concealed, but are also not revealed on a regular basis. For example, the Pentagon regularly reports on the numbers of American troops wounded in Iraq (currently at 31,948) but neglects to mention that it has two other categories injured (10,180) and ill (28,451). All three of these categories represent soldiers who are so damaged physically they have to be medically evacuated to Germany for treatment, but by splitting up the numbers, the sense of casualties is lessened on the public consciousness.

Here's another number that we don't often hear discussed in the media: 287,790. That's the number of returning Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans who had filed a disability claim with the Veterans Administration as of March 25th. That figure was not announced to the public at a news conference, but obtained by Veterans for Common Sense using the Freedom of Information Act.

Why all the secrecy? Why is it so hard to get accurate casualty figures out of our government? Because the Bush Administration knows if Americans woke up to the real, human costs of this war, they would fight harder to oppose it.

Think back to 2002, before the invasion of Iraq, when leading neo-conservative thinker and Donald Rumsfeld aide Ken Adelman predicted the war would be a cakewalk. Or consider this statement from Vice President Dick Cheney. Two days before the invasion, Cheney told NBC's Tim Russert the war would go "relatively quickly, (ending in) weeks rather than months." Today, those comments are gone but the motivation behind them remains.

Unpleasant facts

According to an April 2008 study by the Rand Corporation,

"Shh!" begins one e-mail from Dr. Ira Katz, the head of the VAs Mental Health Division, advising a media spokesperson not to tell CBS News that 1,000 veterans receiving care at the VA try to kill themselves every month.

300,000 Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans currently suffer from post traumatic stress disorder or major depression. Another 320,000 suffer from traumatic brain injury and physical brain damage. A majority are not receiving help from the Pentagon and VA system, which are more concerned with concealing unpleasant facts than they are with providing care.

In its study, the RAND Corporation wrote that the federal government fails to care for war veterans at its own peril - noting post traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury can have far reaching and damaging consequences.

Individuals afflicted with these conditions face higher risks for other psychological problems and for attempting suicide. They have higher rates of unhealthy behaviors such as smoking, overeating, and unsafe sex and higher rates of physical health problems and mortality. Individuals with these conditions also tend to miss more work or report being less productive, the report said. These conditions can impair relationships, disrupt marriages, aggravate the difficulties of parenting, and cause problems in children that may extend the consequences of combat trauma across generations.

These consequences can have a high economic toll, RAND said. However, most attempts to measure the costs of these conditions focus only on medical costs to the government. Yet, direct costs of treatment are only a fraction of the total costs related to mental health

and cognitive conditions. Far higher are the long-term individual and societal costs stemming from lost productivity, reduced quality of life, homelessness, domestic violence, the strain on families, and suicide. Delivering effective care and restoring veterans to full mental health have the potential to reduce these longer-term costs significantly.

Bush and Congress have the power to stop this problem before it gets worse. It's not too late to extend needed mental health care to our returning Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans; it's not too late to begin properly screening and treating returning servicemen and women who've experienced a traumatic brain injury; and it's not too late to simplify the disability claims process so that wounded veterans do not die waiting for their check. As the Rand study shows, this isn't only in the best interest of veterans, it's in the long-run best interest of our country.

To start with, the Bush Administration needs to give us some honest information about the true human costs of the Iraq War.

Aaron Glantz, a Foreign Policy In Focus contributor, is the author of two upcoming books on Iraq: "The War Comes Home: Washingtons Battle Against Americas Veterans" (UC Press) and "Winter Soldier Iraq and Afghanistan: Eyewitness Accounts of the Occupations" (Haymarket). He edits the website WarComesHome.org <<http://WarComesHome.org>>.

Source: Foreign Policy in Focus 5/9/08, <http://www.fpiif.org/fpiftxt/5219>

Why all the secrecy? Because the Bush Administration knows if Americans woke up to the real, human costs of this war, they would fight harder to oppose it.

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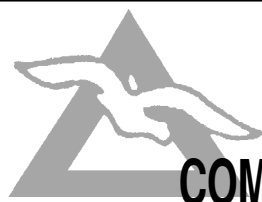
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Quaker organization condemns immigration raids

The Pacific Mountain Region of the American Friends Service Committee expresses deep concern about the immigration raids that took place in the past days in Oakland, Berkeley, San Francisco and other Bay Area cities. “These actions violate peoples’ right to live without harassment and fear, and they stir up unfounded negative sentiments towards migrants and divide working-class families and migrant communities,” said Laura Magnani, Assistant Regional Director for Justice for the AFSC. “We call on ICE and other immigration authorities to adhere to policies that ensure the fair treatment and respect for the civil and constitutional rights of all detainees, access to legal counsel, and the ability to stay in close proximity to their loved ones.”

The American Friends Service Committee expresses its continued support for undocumented immigrants and affirms the basic principle that people who have established new lives in the United States should have access to procedures that permit them to adjust their immigration status. Specifically, AFSC calls on the United States government to grant permanent legal status to all undocumented men, women, and children who reside in the U.S. Furthermore, AFSC calls upon the United States government to implement immigration policies that will:

- respect human rights and international law;
- provide nondiscriminatory application of immigration laws;
* support legalized entry to those under duress or fleeing natural disaster, regardless of national origins and political affiliation; and
- support those pursuing family re-unification.

According to Luis Magaña AFSC’s immigration specialist based in Stockton, “Undocumented immigration represents a desperate response to desperate circumstances, including war, persecution, civil strife, and severe economic distress. Knowing the many types of violence and exclusion faced by undocumented



immigrants, and recognizing that no legislative measure or enforcement tactic has ever stopped undocumented immigration, we have consistently pressed for the legalization of the largest possible number of undocumented immigrants and have worked to help undocumented people obtain legal status.”

Undocumented immigrants work, pay taxes, and contribute to the economic, social, and cultural development of their communities in countless ways. A legalization program would recognize the equity undocumented people have built up through their participation in U.S. society and acknowledge the inherent injustice of the secrecy, vulnerability, and exploitation imposed on undocumented women, men, and children.

AFSC is committed to the

struggle for rights and justice for all immigrant communities. “We pledge to join other organizations sharing this concern and calling for reform of U.S. immigration policies. We applaud the steps immigrant communities have taken to project their own voices into the policy arena and pledge to work alongside them to assure that their voices are strongly heard in the movement for a just immigration policy,” Magaña said.

The American Friends Service Committee is a Quaker organization that includes people of various faiths who are committed to social justice, peace and humanitarian service. Its work is based on the belief in the worth of every person and faith in the power of love to overcome violence and injustice.

Source: AFSC press release 5/8/08

“Undocumented immigration represents a desperate response to desperate circumstances, including war, persecution, civil strife, and severe economic distress.”

Civil liberties update: spies, torture, and the media

ACLU wins vs. FBI in domestic spy case

The ACLU won a hard-fought victory in another legal challenge to the national security letter (NSL) provision of the Patriot Act. As the result of a settlement agreement, the FBI this week withdrew an unconstitutional national security letter issued to the Internet Archive and agreed to unseal the case, finally allowing the Archive's founder to speak out for the first time about his battle against the record demand.

The NSL, issued in November of 2007, asked for personal information about one of the Archive's users, including the individual's name, address, and any electronic communication transactional records pertaining to the user. Brewster Kahle, founder and digital librarian of the Internet Archive, decided to fight the NSL because it exceeded the FBI's limited authority to issue such demands to libraries. The lawsuit is the first known challenge to an NSL served on a library since Congress amended the national security letter provision in 2006 to limit the FBI's power to demand records from libraries.

The NSL included a gag order, prohibiting Kahle from discussing the letter and the legal issues it presented with anyone else except his attorneys, who were also gagged. The gag also prevented the ACLU from discussing the NSL with members of Congress, even though an ACLU lawyer who represents the Archive recently testified at a congressional hearing about the FBI's misuse of NSLs.

"The free flow of information is at the heart of every library's work," said Kahle. "That's why Congress passed a law limiting the FBI's power to issue NSLs to America's libraries. While it's never easy standing up to the government—particularly when I was barred from discussing it with anyone—I knew I had to challenge something that was clearly wrong."

Since the Patriot Act was passed in 2001, relaxing restrictions on the FBI's use of the power, the number of NSLs issued has

seen an astronomical increase, to nearly 200,000 between 2003 and 2006.

More info: <http://action.aclu.org>.

Key figures in Bush's torture team to testify

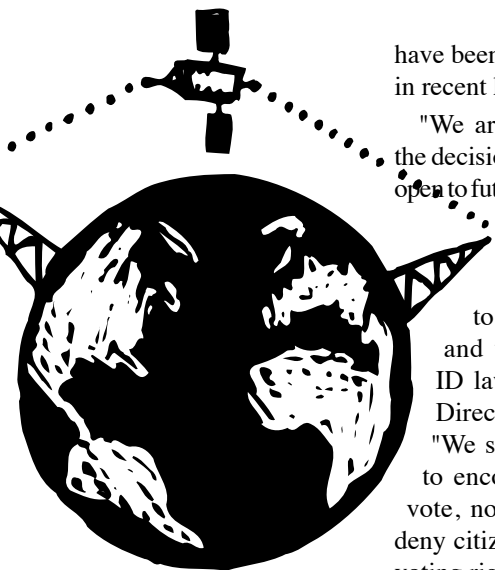
Thanks to the pressure from ACLU members and activists, the House Judiciary Committee this week compelled former members of the Bush administration to appear before the committee as part of an investigation of the authorization of illegal torture of prisoners in US custody by the highest public officials in the executive branch.

Author of the infamous Bush "torture memo," John Yoo and former Attorney General John Ashcroft will testify at an upcoming hearing. The Committee also authorized a subpoena for David Addington, Vice President Cheney's chief of staff, who refused to appear. The recent revelations about the Bush administration confirm our worst fears about subversion of the Constitution and betrayals of the rule of law by top government officials -- that they met regularly and approved the CIA's use of "combined" "enhanced" interrogation techniques.

Congress needs to get to the bottom of which officials were involved in ordering or authorizing torture—and what laws were broken. Did high government officials violate the War Crimes Act, the Anti-Torture Act, or federal criminal assault laws?

Additionally, as part of the ACLU's work to get at the truth about torture, the Defense Department last week released unredacted reports from internal investigations into charges of detainee abuse. The documents were released in response to an ACLU Freedom of Information Act lawsuit.

The uncensored documents from the Church Report include disturbing new details exposing the role of psychologists in military interrogations; information about the failure of military medical



personnel to report abuses at Abu Ghraib; the military's use of unlawful interrogation methods, even after such methods were banned; and detainee deaths in Afghanistan and Iraq that look to be the result of abuse.

ACTION: Tell the House Judiciary Committee to ask the tough questions about torture. More info: read the newly unredacted documents and the full Church Report. <http://action.aclu.org/>.

Supreme court's voter ID decision will harm eligible voters

The U.S. Supreme Court last week rejected a challenge to Indiana's most-restrictive-in-the-nation voter identification law less than 10 days before the Indiana Democratic primary. The case, Crawford v. Marion County Election Board, brought by the ACLU, is an appeal of two lower court decisions that upheld the state's law requiring that voters present government-issued photo IDs in order to vote. The ACLU argued that the Indiana law creates an unconstitutional burden on voting rights.

In January 2007, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit in Chicago upheld Indiana's voter ID law though there is no evidence that Indiana's voter ID law is justified by any actual problem of voting fraud, which is already prohibited by various criminal statutes in the state. No cases of in-person voting fraud

have been prosecuted in the state in recent history.

"We are very disappointed in the decision, but it leaves the door open to future challenges in Indiana and elsewhere by registered voters who are denied their right to vote based on onerous and unconstitutional voter ID laws," said ACLU Legal Director Steven R. Shapiro. "We should be seeking ways to encourage more people to vote, not inventing excuses to deny citizens their constitutional voting rights."

The Supreme Court's decision on the constitutionality of voter ID laws has broad national significance with the 2008 election underway. Indiana is one of over 20 states that have passed restrictive voter ID laws, while other states are considering similar legislation.

Backroom FISA deal brewing as report confirms major government spying

In February, the House stood up to President Bush's fear-mongering tactics by letting the so-called "Protect America Act" expire. This ill-named bill eviscerated the protections of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) and violated the constitutional rights of Americans. But last week, the ACLU caught wind of a dangerous backroom deal brewing which would rush a House vote pushing through a dangerous sellout on government spying powers.

This news comes on the heels of a newly released Justice Department report which shows an unprecedented expansion of the government's use of secret warrants for domestic spying. According to the report, the number of secret warrants approved by the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court more than doubled in the past seven years. The court approved 2,370 requests last year, compared to 1,012 in 2000.

The ACLU is leading a massive effort to let Congress know that

America is watching. Congress must hear loud and clear their constituents expect them to vote against any compromise deal that gives the law-breaking phone companies immunity, or allows spying on Americans without warrants.

ACTION: Don't let your House member give President Bush even greater spying powers.

Stop media concentration

The right to free speech is in jeopardy, thanks to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). Recently, the Commission basically gutted a rule that limited the number of both newspaper and television stations giant media conglomerates are able to buy up in the same city. This means that a few giant media conglomerates will be able to consolidate even more control over media markets. Currently six of these conglomerates control most of the media in the US.

"The consolidation of TV, radio and newspaper ownership that has occurred already limits the scope of the marketplace of ideas and hinders vigorous public debate, thereby posing a great threat to the First Amendment rights of all Americans," said Caroline Fredrickson, Director of the ACLU's Washington Legislative Office.

A few astute senators realized that democracy is not served well by a media oligarchy where half a dozen CEOs have the power to decide what Americans see and read in the news. And the Senate Commerce Committee has already approved a resolution that would push the FCC to stop media consolidation.

Now, we need the full Congress to approve the Senate Commerce Committee's resolution that would reverse the decision of the FCC.

ACTION: Tell your representative that democracy is better served by many voices in the news business.

Source: ACLU release 5/9/08 American Civil Liberties Union, 125 Broad St, 18th Floor, NY, NY 10004-2400 www.aclu.org

Food summit declares regional emergency

Jose Silva

The presidential summit on "Food for Life", held in Nicaragua, has ended with 16 Latin American countries agreeing to produce more food and sell it at low prices through strategic alliances, amid criticisms of free markets and capitalism. The summit on regional food sovereignty and security was convened by Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega to debate the global crisis caused by food shortages and to seek regional solutions.

Presidents Manuel Zelaya of Honduras, Oscar Arias of Costa Rica, Rafael Correa of Ecuador, Evo Morales of Bolivia and Rene Preval of Haiti attended the summit meeting on Wednesday. Delegations from El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Venezuela, Belize, Panama, Dominica, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the

Dominican Republic and Cuba also took part.

Representatives of United Nations agencies, the Organisation of American States (OAS), the European Union, international financial institutions and the business world were present as observers. Ortega, as host, chaired the discussions, and during breaks between speakers he wasted no opportunity to condemn the "empire", meaning the United States, and "neoliberal policies imposed by the international financial institutions."

The presidents of Haiti, Bolivia, Ecuador and even Costa Rica joined Ortega in blaming the world's most developed countries for the global food crisis.

According to statistics from the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organisations (FAO), over the

last year the international price of maize increased by 31 percent, rice by 74 percent, vegetable oils 60 percent, dairy products 83 percent, soybeans 87 percent, and wheat 130 percent.

The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) warned in late April that "the steep and persistent rise in international food prices is hitting particularly hard on the poorest in Latin America and the Caribbean." To illustrate, Cuban Vice President Esteban Lazo said that in 2005, his government paid the equivalent of 250 dollars for a ton of imported rice, while "it now costs us 1,050 dollars—four times as much."

"The food crisis is exacerbated by the high price of oil, which is a result of the war being waged in Iraq, climate change, and neoliberal policies in the United

States and Europe," Lazo added.

Ecuadorean President Correa said that "the enormous difference about world poverty in the 21st century is that it is not due to shortages, but to unequal distribution" of resources. Like the rest of the participants, Correa stressed the urgent need to step up agricultural production in Latin America and abandon neoliberal food import policies which, he said, the international financial institutions recommended to developing countries in recent years with the backing of the United States.

Morales declared his opposition to the use of food crops for making biofuels, and berated the industrialised countries.

"Unlimited industrialisation is the drug of planet Earth, and capitalism is synonymous with death," he said.

At Ortega's request, Preval described the dire situation in Haiti, the poorest country in the Americas. "What is happening in my country is a catastrophe," said Preval. Food shortages led to violent disturbances in April that left at least six people dead and several people injured, while shopkeepers incurred damages as a result of looting.

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez was not at the meeting due to illness.

The surprise of the day came from Costa Rican President Arias, who harshly criticised the United States and European countries. According to Arias, the present state of affairs is the result of "the hypocrisy of the United States and Europe when dealing with the most important issues on the international agenda." The United States has offered only one billion dollars in food aid to the world's poorest countries, "the same amount they spend in half a week on the war in Iraq," Arias said. The World Trade Organisation (WTO)'s Doha Round of talks, aimed at freeing up trade in agriculture and other areas, "is an example of hypocrisy on the part of developed countries, that continue to subsidise farm goods," he said. Another "great monument

to hypocrisy" is the Kyoto Protocol on climate change, Arias said, "because rich countries, having polluted the planet in order to enrich themselves, are now asking us not to do so."

After a session of speeches lasting four hours, Ortega gave the floor over to Venezuelan Foreign Minister Nicolas Maduro, who made the only formal proposal received by the meeting, consisting of seven points.

Venezuela offered to set up an agricultural fund of 100 million dollars to finance concrete plans arising from the summit. Maduro also proposed a special plan within Petrocaribe - an oil cooperation scheme between Venezuela and Caribbean nations - to finance agricultural production and make fuel available for food production at low prices. In exchange, beneficiary countries would join the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), a regional integration initiative led by Chavez.

President Arias, who withheld his signature from the final document, said "there are some value judgements, concepts that I don't agree with."

The final statement, signed by all the countries at the summit except El Salvador and Costa Rica, declared a regional food "emergency" and urged the 63rd U.N. General Assembly to address the world food crisis when it meets in September.

It also called on Latin American and Caribbean governments to increase investment in agriculture, and suggested that private banks in the region invest up to 10 percent of their assets in agricultural development.

The document called for a draft plan of action within 30 days to boost local food production in the region and establish a system of "fair trade within and between the countries that results in fair prices for producers and consumers," and urged the international community to "significantly" boost cooperation to ease the crisis.

Source: Inter Press Service 5/8/08 <<http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=42294>>

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The global food crisis explained

Peter Montague

Global food prices have risen 83% in the last 3 years. This spring, as prices rose steeply, food riots broke out in Haiti, Egypt, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Mauritania, Ethiopia, Uzbekistan, Yemen, the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia and Italy, among other places. Because U.S. energy policy subsidizes farmers to grow corn to make ethanol (alcohol that can supplement gasoline), the U.S. is being accused of feeding its sport utility vehicles (SUVs) instead of feeding people. There is some truth to this charge, but it's more complicated than that.[1]

The global food crisis has been created by a combination of things, among them:

- Climate changes, perhaps related to global warming, such as the recent large tornado in Myanmar, the epic drought going on now in Australia, floods last year in North Korea, and years of low rainfall in the western U.S., among other costly weather changes. Australia used to export enough rice to feed 20 million people, but six years of drought have cut their rice yield by 98%. Australia used to be the world's second-largest exporter of wheat, but the drought has changed that, too. "A big reason for higher wheat prices... is the multi-year drought in Australia, something scientists say may become persistent because of global warming," according to the Washington Post.
- U.S. farmers have been growing less wheat since the mid-1990s in favor of more-reliable soybeans and better-subsidized corn. "Wheat's biggest problem is its susceptibility to disease, which

has turned many farmers against it," explains Dan Morgan in the Washington Post.

- Rising oil prices, caused partly by rising demand for oil in China and India (and in U.S. SUVs), and partly by diminished supply caused by the Iraq war. Because of rising oil prices, the cost of transporting food has doubled in the last year alone. Furthermore, the price of fertilizer is tightly linked to the price of oil and has been rising for about five years. Use of fertilizer in the third world increased 56% between 1996 and 2008.

Increasingly it is looking as though the "peak oil" moment has arrived—the moment when half the Earth's available oil has been extracted. After that "peak oil" moment, oil prices are expected to zig-zag upward more or less steadily.

- The demand for meat is growing in the third world as our own meat-heavy diet is increasingly adopted world-wide. It takes about 700 calories of animal feed to produce a 100-calorie piece of red meat, so a shift to a meat-rich diet requires large increases in grains, which in turn requires greater use of expensive fertilizers, which in turn raises the demand for oil.

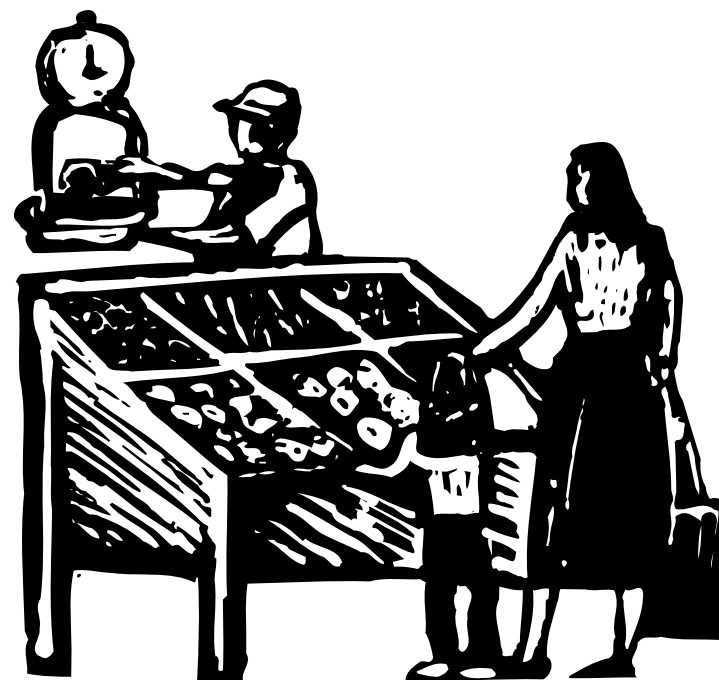
- As the soaring price of oil has increased the cost of transporting food, economies as diverse as Argentina, Brazil, Egypt, India, Vietnam and the Ukraine (among others) have been feeling

inflationary pressures, and have restricted food exports in an attempt to hold down domestic food prices. This has reduced food available on the global market.

- So-called "free trade" policies have caused some previously self-sufficient nations to become food importers. This occurs in several ways. First, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund require loan recipients to make "structural adjustments" in the way they do business. For example, they must open their grain markets to competition from U.S. farmers, who are subsidized by Uncle Sam to the tune of \$300 billion per year). Competition from cheap, subsidized U.S. crops tends to drive small local farmers out of business and off their land. Second, "structural adjustment" often demands a reduction of social safety nets, so when a food crisis hits the remaining infrastructure can't manage. Third, stockpiling food is officially discouraged (a mountain of available food interferes with the "free market"). Thus an important cushion against hunger has been eliminated. A classic case is Haiti, which used to be self-sufficient for its main staple crop—rice—but now is a rice importer, increasingly subject to the whims of commodity speculators and agribusiness corporations.

- Commodity speculators. Food has become "the new gold." "Investors fleeing Wall Street's mortgage-related strife plowed hundreds of millions of dollars into grain futures, driving prices up even more," the Washington Post reported April 27. Rising food prices have attracted hedge fund speculators, who have helped create a "bubble" in food prices. "As financial markets have tumbled, food prices have soared," acknowledges Robert Zoellick, president of the World Bank.

- The U.S. Department of Agriculture's land conservation program pays farmers to not grow crops on some of their land. About 8% of U.S. cropland—some 37 million acres, larger than the state of New York—lies fallow as a result of this program. This



is good for ducks and pheasant and it reduces soil erosion, but it also reduces available crops, holding crop prices higher than they might otherwise be (which is one purpose of the program).

- And lastly, in the U.S. at least, we spend huge amounts of money feeding our pets. I know I am touching the third rail here, but someone has got to mention this 900-pound gorilla in the room. The American Pet Products Manufacturers Association expects Americans to spend about \$43.4 billion on their pets in 2008, up from \$41.2 billion in 2007. About \$16.9 billion of that will be spent on pet food.

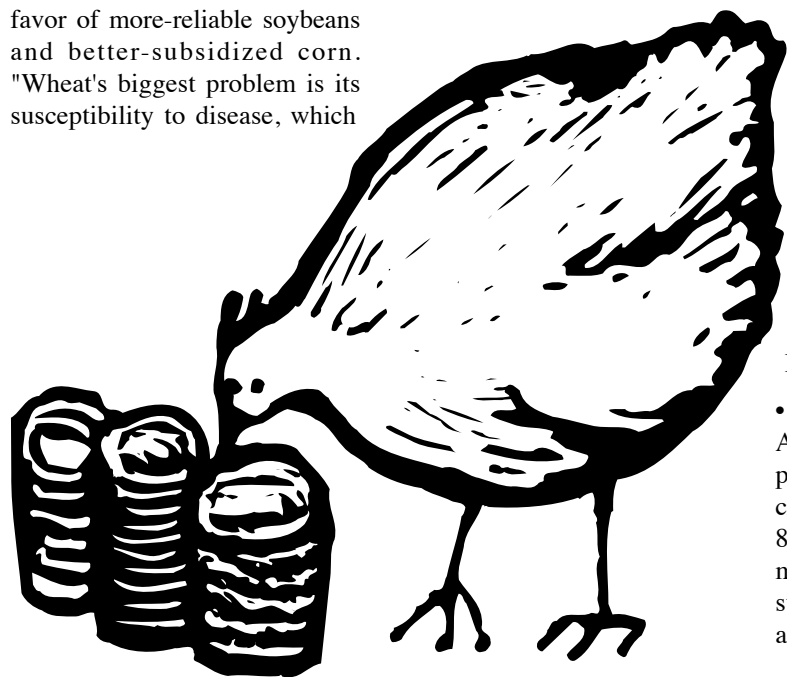
Meanwhile President Bush has proposed that Congress should dedicate \$770 million for food aid to a hungry world. "The American people are generous people, and they're compassionate people," Mr. Bush said, announcing his new food aid plan. "We believe in a timeless truth: to whom much is given, much is expected." The President's gift of \$770 million to the world's 100 million hungriest people represents 4.6% of what we spend each year feeding Fido and Kitty. (And, by the way, we are spending \$770 million every 42 hours in Iraq.)

[1] The U.S. is currently putting 20 to 25% of its corn acreage into ethanol production, producing roughly 8 billion gallons of ethanol in 2007, but the entire U.S. ethanol

industry is still small, valued at only \$40 billion total—equivalent to one year's net profits of a large oil company like Exxon, which reported netting \$40.6 billion in 2007. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that ethanol from corn (in the U.S. and Europe) is responsible for 10 to 15% of the rise in global commodity prices. The International Food Policy Research Institute in Washington, D.C. says 25% to 33% of the rise in global food prices can be explained by ethanol production from corn.

Source: Rachel's #958: Causes of the Global Food Crisis 5/10/08, www.rachel.org Environmental Research Foundation, P.O. Box 160, New Brunswick, N.J. 08903

Source note: Rachel's Democracy & Health News (formerly Rachel's Environment & Health News) highlights the connections between issues that are often considered separately or not at all. The natural world is deteriorating and human health is declining because those who make the important decisions aren't the ones who bear the brunt. Our purpose is to connect the dots between human health, the destruction of nature, the decline of community, the rise of economic insecurity and inequalities, growing stress among workers and families, and the crippling legacies of patriarchy, intolerance, and racial injustice that allow us to be divided and therefore ruled by the few. In a democracy, there are no more fundamental questions than, "Who gets to decide?" And, "How do the few control the many, and what might be done about it?" Check out Rachel's on the web.





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What plastic recycling symbols mean

The *Daily Green* offers this handy guide on the various types of plastic:

Number 1 Plastics—PET or PETE (polyethylene terephthalate)

* Found In: Soft drinks, water and beer bottles; mouthwash bottles; peanut butter containers; salad dressing and vegetable oil containers; ovenable food trays.

* Recycling: Pick up through most curbside recycling programs.

* Recycled Into: Polar fleece, fiber, tote bags, furniture, carpet, paneling, straps, (occasionally) new containers.

It poses low risk of leaching breakdown products. Recycling rates remain relatively low (around 20 percent), though the material is in high demand by remanufacturers.

Number 2 Plastics—HDPE (high density polyethylene)

* Found In: Milk jugs, juice bottles; bleach, detergent and household cleaner bottles; shampoo bottles; some trash and shopping bags; motor oil bottles; butter and yogurt tubs; cereal box liners

* Recycling: Pick up through most curbside recycling programs, although some only allow those containers with necks.

* Recycled Into: Laundry detergent bottles, oil bottles, pens, recycling containers, floor tile, drainage pipe, lumber, benches, doghouses, picnic tables, fencing.

HDPE carries low risk of leaching and is readily recyclable into many goods.

Number 3 Plastics—V (Vinyl) or PVC

* Found In: Window cleaner and detergent bottles, shampoo bottles, cooking oil bottles, clear food packaging, wire jacketing, medical equipment, siding, windows, piping.

* Recycling: Rarely recycled; accepted by some plastic lumber makers.

* Recycled Into: Decks, paneling, mudflaps, roadway gutters, flooring, cables, speed bumps,

mats

PVC contains chlorine, so its manufacture can release highly dangerous dioxins. If you must cook with PVC, don't let the plastic touch food. Never burn PVC, because it releases toxins.

Number 4 Plastics -- LDPE (low density polyethylene)

* Found In: Squeezable bottles; bread, frozen food, dry cleaning and shopping bags; tote bags; clothing; furniture; carpet

* Recycling: LDPE is not often recycled through curbside programs, but some communities will accept it. Plastic shopping bags can be returned

to many stores for recycling.

* Recycled Into: Trash can liners and cans, compost bins, shipping envelopes, paneling, lumber, landscaping ties, floor tile

Historically, LDPE has not been accepted through most American curbside recycling programs, but more and more communities are starting to accept it.

Number 5 Plastics—PP (polypropylene)

* Found In: Some yogurt containers, syrup bottles, ketchup bottles, caps, straws, medicine bottles

* Recycling: Number 5 plastics can be recycled through some curbside programs.

* Recycled Into: Signal lights, battery cables, brooms, brushes, auto battery cases, ice scrapers, landscape borders, bicycle racks, rakes, bins, pallets, trays.

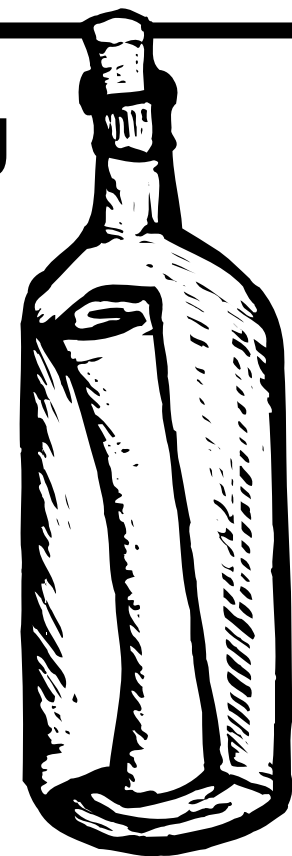
Polypropylene has a high melting point, and so is often chosen for containers that must accept hot liquid. It is gradually becoming more accepted by recyclers.

Number 6 Plastics—PS (polystyrene)

* Found In: Disposable plates and cups, meat trays, egg cartons, carry-out containers, aspirin bottles, compact disc cases

* Recycling: Number 6 plastics can be recycled through some curbside programs.

* Recycled Into: Insulation, light



switch plates, egg cartons, vents, rulers, foam packing, carry-out containers.

Polystyrene can be made into rigid or foam products—in the latter case it is popularly known as the trademark Styrofoam. Evidence suggests polystyrene can leach potential toxins into foods. The material was long on environmentalists' hit lists for dispersing widely across the landscape, and for being notoriously difficult to recycle.

Number 7 Plastic—Miscellaneous

* Found In: Three- and five-gallon water bottles, 'bullet-proof' materials, sunglasses, DVDs, iPod and computer cases, signs and displays, certain food containers, nylon.

* Recycling: Number 7 plastics have traditionally not been recycled, though some curbside programs now take them.

* Recycled Into: Plastic lumber, custom-made products.

A wide variety of plastic resins that don't fit into the previous categories are lumped into number 7. A few are even made from plants (polyactide) and are compostable. Polycarbonate is number 7, and is the hard plastic that has parents worried these days, after studies have shown it can leach potential hormone disruptors.

Source: *The Daily Green* 3/31/08 <http://www.thedailygreen.com/green-homes/latest/recycling-symbols-plastics-460321>

Biofuels 2.0: it's time for Congress to act

Christopher Flavin

Efforts to replace oil with biofuels in the United States are at a critical juncture. Double-digit growth in the production of corn-based ethanol has contributed to a sharp increase in grain and soybean prices while failing to deliver the environmental gains that had been hoped for.

It's time to reduce the incentives for food-based biofuels and accelerate the transition to more sustainable alternatives - the so-called "next-generation" cellulosic technologies, which are expected to become viable in the coming years.

In some ways, U.S. biofuels policy has been a stunning success. Production of fuel ethanol soared to nearly 7 billion gallons in 2007 - double the level in 2003. This has pushed the United States ahead of Brazil, which pioneered the fuel ethanol industry in the 1980s. The price of corn has meanwhile nearly tripled to over \$6 per bushel, fostering an economic renaissance in the U.S. grain belt and creating thousands of new jobs.

But this is just the beginning. The Renewable Fuels Standard (RFS), signed into law in December 2007, requires that biofuels production be raised to 36 billion gallons in 2022. And while it is laudable that 21 billion gallons of that requirement are set aside for advanced biofuels not based on food crops, this would still imply a doubling in current production of corn-based ethanol, which would require fully half of today's annual corn crop.

Increasing biofuels production so dramatically presents an array of environmental risks, including increased nitrogen runoff and the loss of biodiversity as lands are cleared for biofuel crops. And recent studies indicate that corn-based ethanol could actually produce more carbon dioxide emissions than gasoline - due to the oil and coal needed to produce corn and convert it to ethanol and to the fact that as U.S. cropland is planted in biofuel crops, pressures will grow to convert forests and grasslands elsewhere, releasing large amounts of carbon dioxide.

These concerns demand a more measured approach to the production and use of biofuels. They also point to the need to accelerate the transition to second-generation biofuels. These fuels - derived not from food crops but from the fibrous, or cellulosic, material of plants - can be produced from a wide array of agriculture and forestry wastes as well as from fast-growing trees and grasses. The feedstocks can be grown on untilled land and cultivated in ways that improve water quality and wildlife habitat. Under the right conditions, these crops may also be able to draw carbon out of the air and sequester it in the soil.

It is time to reform the large federal subsidies to biofuels. With the price of oil now over \$120 a barrel, the generous tax subsidy is no longer needed - it is mainly benefiting the oil companies that receive the subsidy in return for blending ethanol with gasoline. Congress should phase out

the tax subsidy

for corn-based ethanol and retain it only for advanced biofuels that reduce emissions of carbon dioxide to less than half the emissions from gasoline.

It is also time to relax the renewable fuel standard, slowing the pace of growth of the industry while technologies are developed that will allow biofuels to be produced from agricultural and forestry wastes - eliminating the competition with food and reducing the greenhouse impact of those fuels. And the share that must come from cellulosic biofuels should be increased.

Achieving these changes will not be easy. Biofuels have become the "golden child" of U.S. energy politics, highly popular with conservative and progressive politicians alike. But if biofuel policies are not reformed soon, the growing impact on food prices and the environment will spur a reaction that may prove the industry's undoing.

That would be a shame. The United States desperately needs to diversify its fuel supplies and reduce its dependence on oil. Advanced biofuels technologies could one day be an important part of a low-carbon energy economy, but only if they are developed in a deliberate and responsible way.

Christopher Flavin is president of the Worldwatch Institute <<http://www.worldwatch.org/>>, an environmental research organization based in Washington, D.C.

Source: Worldwatch Institute release 5/13/08 <http://www.worldwatch.org>



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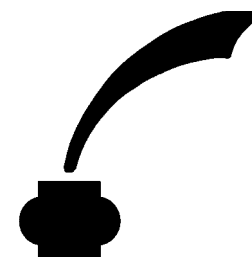
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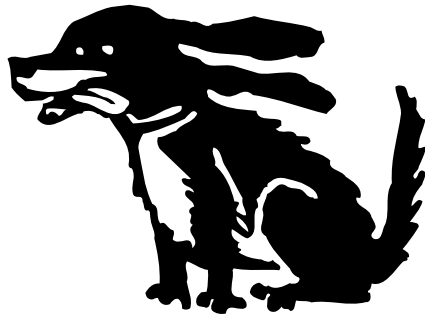
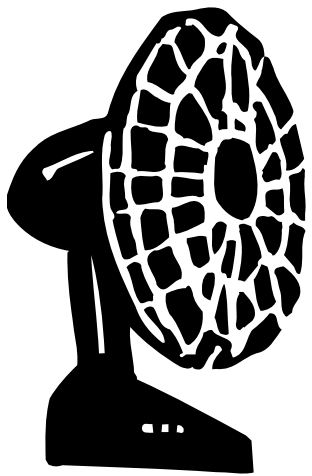
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World carbon dioxide levels highest in 650,000 years

David Adam

The rise in chief greenhouse gas is worse than feared. Earth may be losing the ability to absorb CO₂, say scientists. The concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has reached a record high, according to the latest figures, renewing fears that climate change could begin to slide out of control.

Scientists at the Mauna Loa observatory in Hawaii say that CO₂ levels in the atmosphere now stand at 387 parts per million (ppm), up almost 40% since the industrial revolution and the highest for at least the last 650,000 years.

The figures, published by the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration on its website, also confirm that carbon dioxide, the chief greenhouse gas, is accumulating in the atmosphere faster than expected. The annual mean growth rate for 2007 was 2.14ppm - the fourth year in the last six to see an annual rise greater than 2ppm. From 1970 to 2000, the concentration rose by about 1.5ppm each year, but since 2000 the annual rise has leapt to an average 2.1ppm.

Scientists say the shift could indicate that the Earth is losing its natural ability to soak up billions of tonnes of CO₂ each year. Climate models assume that about half our future emissions will be reabsorbed by forests and oceans, but the new figures confirm this may be too optimistic. If more of our carbon pollution stays in the atmosphere, it means emissions will have to be cut by more than is currently projected to prevent dangerous levels of global warming.

Martin Parry, co-chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's working group on impacts, said: "Despite all the talk, the situation is getting worse. Levels of greenhouse gases continue to rise in the atmosphere and the rate of that rise is accelerating. We are already seeing the impacts of climate change and the scale of those impacts will also accelerate, until we decide to do something about it."

Perched some 11,000 ft up a volcano, the Mauna Loa observatory

has been measuring carbon dioxide in the atmosphere since 1958. It is regarded as producing among the most reliable data sets because of its remote location, far from any possible source of the gas that could confuse the sensors.

Over the decades, the Mauna Loa readings, made famous in Al Gore's documentary *An Inconvenient Truth*, show the CO₂ level rising and falling each year as foliage across the northern hemisphere blooms in spring and recedes in autumn. But they also show an upward trend as human emissions pour into the atmosphere, and each spring, the total CO₂ level creeps above the previous year's high to set a new record.

Robin Oakley, head of Greenpeace's climate change campaign, said: "We're now witnessing a key moment in the climate change story, and it's not good news. The last time the atmosphere was this choked with CO₂ humans were yet to evolve as a species."

A study last year suggested that

the recent surge in atmospheric CO₂ levels was due to three processes: growth in the world economy, heavy use of coal in China, and a weakening of natural sinks: forests, seas and soils that absorb carbon. The scientists said the increase was 35% larger than they expected. They said about half of the carbon surge was due to the Chinese reliance on coal, which has forced up the carbon intensity of the overall world economy since 2000, reversing a trend of increasing energy efficiency since the 1970s.

Source: *The Guardian* UK 5/13/08 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2008/may/13/carbonemissions.climatechange> via www.truthout.org



Global warming bill a good start

An analysis released today demonstrates that meeting global warming pollution reduction targets in the Lieberman-Warner Climate Security Act will reduce oil imports, increase clean energy production and lead to dramatically more fuel-efficient vehicles. The analysis, conducted by the International Resources Group for the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), also found that reaching the targets can be done with minimal cost to our energy system, less than one half of one percent. IRG used a model of the U.S. energy economy developed by the Environmental Protection Agency to examine how the emission limits specified by the Lieberman-Warner bill can be achieved.

"This analysis confirms that passing Lieberman-Warner will lead to increased energy efficiency, more electricity from renewables, and reduced oil consumption," said Dan Lashof, director of NRDC's Climate Center. "We have known for some time that a firm limit on global warming pollution with an accompanying market would produce jobs, provide manufacturing opportunities and spark innovation. This analysis confirms that we can do this with little cost to our energy system."

The model calculates CO₂ allowance prices that rise steadily over time from \$12 per ton of CO₂ in 2020 to \$20 per ton in 2030 and almost \$50 per ton in 2050. The US-NM50 MARKAL model used for the analysis found that the Lieberman-Warner emission

limits could be achieved with contributions to global warming pollution reductions from the following sources (Case A):

- Electric demand reduction: 19 percent
- Renewable energy: 24 percent
- Carbon sequestration: 8 percent
- Domestic offsets: 13 percent
- International credits: 18 percent
- Nuclear power: 0 percent

IRG modelers also created a compliance pathway (Case B) that illustrates a future with major continued investments in coal generation, with more substantial reliance on CCS. In this case carbon sequestration contributes 19 percent of the emission reductions and the contributions from electric demand reductions and renewable energy are reduced somewhat.

Under the Lieberman-Warner bill natural gas demand will decrease substantially as renewable electricity generation increases, according to the analysis. Renewables will grow to between 50 percent and 60 percent of total electricity supply. In this model, renewables are a mix of biomass, geothermal, concentrating solar power, solar photovoltaics and wind technologies. The two main contributors to renewable electric output are large, remote wind farms and concentrating solar power.

Source: *Natural Resources Defense Council* release 5/14/08, www.nrdc.org

Lawn signs, mugs, T-shirts

"War is NOT the answer" lawn signs come from the Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL). We are requesting a \$5 donation to cover costs (sorry, we can't ship lawn signs). We also have elegant pins made of pewter in the shape of the peace symbol for \$10. Also, handsome PJN T-shirts in many colors, and more. Come by the P&J Center to see these items, plus buttons and bumperstickers galore, 231 Bedford Rd, Stockton CA 95204. Call 467-4455.



Two million children to be directly impacted by the foreclosure crisis

A new report released late April revealed that an estimated 2 million children will be directly impacted by the subprime mortgage crisis as their families lose their homes due to foreclosures. As the first comprehensive analysis of how the crisis will impact kids, the report explains that this number will rise even higher when accounting for other populations, such as children being evicted from rental units that are going into default and those children whose parents default on conventional loans. These foreclosures will happen primarily during 2008 and 2009.

The report, which includes state-by-state estimates of the number of children that are directly impacted by this crisis, indicates that foreclosures often result in disruptions to a child's education, as well as issues relating to their physical and mental health. Moreover, behavioral issues are more likely to arise in children who lose their homes, as positive peer relationships disintegrate when children are forced from their neighborhoods.

"We often hear about the impact that the mortgage crisis is having on the stock market and on the nation's economy, but we hear little about the impact this crisis is having on the lives of two million of our nation's children," said Bruce Lesley, President of First Focus, a bipartisan children's advocacy organization, who issued the report. "When families lose their homes, kids often lose their schools and access to services. Such changes not only impact their education but their physical and mental health as well."

Based on racial/ethnic data reported under the Home Mortgage Disclosure Act, the report projects that 504,600 Latino children, 281,200 African American children, and 1.166 million White/Other children will be directly impacted by the crisis. The total number impacted is 1.952 million children.

In addition, the report finds:



* Due to the increasing number of foreclosures, school districts across the country are experiencing increases in the number of homeless children entering their classrooms;

* Children impacted by the mortgage crisis are likely to experience excessive mobility and as a result are only half as likely to be proficient in reading as their peers. Moreover, they are much more likely to be held back and eventually drop out of school;


* Children forced from their homes experience behavioral problems, such as increases in violence;

* The physical and mental health of displaced children can be severely compromised, as families losing their homes are less likely to have money available for items such as health care and health insurance.

Source: First Focus release 4/30/08
<http://www.firstfocus.net>

"We hear little about the impact this crisis is having on the lives of two million of our nation's children. When families lose their homes, kids often lose their schools and access to services. Such changes not only impact their education but their physical and mental health as well."

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Hooked on war: Americans pay the price

Professor Chalmers Johnson

In his farewell address of February, 1961, President Eisenhower warned against the military-industrial complex: "The conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry is new in the American experience."

By 1990 the value of the weapons, equipment and factories devoted to the Department of Defense was 83% of the value of all plant and equipment in US manufacturing. Since then military spending has ratcheted up, thanks to the massive vested interests that have become entrenched around the military establishment. Military industries crowd out the civilian economy and lead to severe economic weaknesses. This is a form of slow economic suicide.

Higher spending, fewer jobs

In 2007, the Center for Economic and Policy Research of Washington, DC... concluded: "It is often believed that wars and military spending increases are good for the economy. In fact, most economic models show that military spending diverts resources from productive uses, such as consumption and investment, and ultimately slows economic growth and reduces employment."

Back in the 1950s, it was believed that the US could afford both a massive military establishment and a high standard of living, and that it needed both to maintain full employment. Guns and butter. But it did not work out that way. By the 1960s it was becoming apparent that turning over the nation's largest manufacturing enterprises to the Department of Defense and producing goods without any investment or consumption value was starting to crowd out civilian economic activities. During the 1950s and 1960s, between one-third and two-thirds of all US research talent was siphoned off into the military sector. It is, of course, impossible to know what innovations never appeared as a result of this diversion of resources and brainpower into the service of the military, but

it was during the 1960s that we first began to notice Japan was outpacing us in the design and quality of a range of consumer goods, including household electronics and automobiles. Can we reverse the trend?

Nuclear weapons furnish a striking illustration. Between the 1940s and 1996, the US spent at least \$5.8 trillion on the development, testing and construction of nuclear bombs. As of 2006, we still had 9,960 of them. There is today no sane use for them, while the trillions spent on them could have been used to solve the problems of social security and health care, quality education and access to higher education for all, not to speak of the retention of highly-skilled jobs within the economy.

The pioneer in analyzing what has been lost as a result of military Keynesianism [= government spending to "stimulate" the economy] was the late Seymour Melman, a professor of industrial engineering and operations research at Columbia University. His 1970 book, *Pentagon Capitalism: The Political Economy of War*, was a prophetic analysis of the unintended consequences of the US preoccupation with its armed forces and their weaponry since the onset of the cold war. Melman wrote: "From 1946 to 1969, the United States government spent over \$1,000 billion on the military, more than half of this under the Kennedy and Johnson administrations - the period during which the [Pentagon-dominated] state management was established as a formal institution. This sum of staggering size (try to visualize a billion of something) does not express the cost of the military establishment to the nation as a whole. The true cost is measured by what has been foregone, by the accumulated deterioration in many facets of life, by the inability to alleviate human wretchedness of long duration."

Thomas Woods adds: "According to the US Department of Defense, during the four decades from 1947 through 1987, it used (in 1982 dollars) \$7.62 trillion in capital resources. In 1985, the Department of Commerce



estimated the value of the nation's plant and equipment, and infrastructure, at just over \$7.29 trillion... The amount spent over that period could have doubled the American capital stock or modernized and replaced its existing stock".

The fact that we did not modernize or replace our capital assets is one of the main reasons why, by the turn of the 21st century, our manufacturing base had all but evaporated. Machine tools, an industry on which Melman was an authority, are a particularly important symptom. In November 1968, a five-year inventory disclosed "that 64% of the metalworking machine tools used in US industry were 10 years old or older. The age of this industrial equipment (drills, lathes, etc.) marks the United States' machine tool stock as the oldest among all major industrial nations, and it marks the continuation of a deterioration process that began with the end of the second world war. This deterioration at the base of the industrial system certifies to the continuous debilitating and depleting effect that the military use of capital and research and development talent has had on American industry."

Nothing has been done since 1968 to reverse these trends and it shows today in our massive

imports of equipment, from medical machines like proton accelerators for radiological therapy (made primarily in Belgium, Germany, and Japan) to cars and trucks.

Our short tenure as the world's lone superpower has come to an end. As Harvard economics professor Benjamin Friedman has written: "Again and again it has always been the world's leading lending country that has been the premier country in terms of political influence, diplomatic influence and cultural influence. It's no accident that we took over the role from the British at the same time that we took over the job of being the world's leading lending country. Today we are no longer the world's leading lending country. In fact we are now the world's biggest debtor country,

and we are continuing to wield influence on the basis of military prowess alone".

Some of the damage can never be rectified. There are, however, some steps that the US urgently needs to take. These include reversing Bush's 2001 and 2003 tax cuts for the wealthy, beginning to liquidate our global empire of over 800 military bases, cutting from the defense budget all projects that bear no relationship to national security, and ceasing to use the defense budget as a jobs program.

If we do these things we have a chance of squeaking by. If we don't, we face probable national insolvency and a long depression.

—abridged from the *Nation* magazine

“...Military spending diverts resources from productive uses, such as consumption and investment, and ultimately slows economic growth and reduces employment.”

The Federal numbers racket

David Fiderer

Numbers tell a story. Especially over time. They compel us to focus on results—success and failure. Over the short term, maybe a few years, numbers can be manipulated or give false signals. But not over decades, and not over a generation. The numbers over the past 30 years are not refutable. When it comes to creating jobs and managing the nation's finances, Democratic presidents demonstrate success while Republican presidents show failure.

Job creation

Jimmy Carter, 1977-1980: 10.5 million new jobs

Bill Clinton, 1993-1996: 11.6 million new jobs

Bill Clinton, 1997-2000: 12.4 million new jobs

Total: 33.6 million jobs created over 12 years, or 2.8 million jobs per year

Ronald Reagan 1981-1984: 5.2 million new jobs

Ronald Reagan 1985-1988: 10.8 million new jobs

George H.W. Bush 1989-1992: 2.6 million new jobs

George W. Bush 2001-2004: 0.2 million fewer jobs

George W. Bush 2005-2007: 5.5 million new jobs

Total: 24 million jobs created over 19 years, or 1.3 million jobs per year

Government spending

How much did the government spend for every dollar of revenue?

Jimmy Carter, 1977-1980: \$ 1.16

Bill Clinton, 1993-1996: \$1.25

Bill Clinton, 1997-2000: \$1.01

Democratic Average: \$1.16

Ronald Reagan 1981-1984: \$1.31

Ronald Reagan 1985-1988: \$1.38

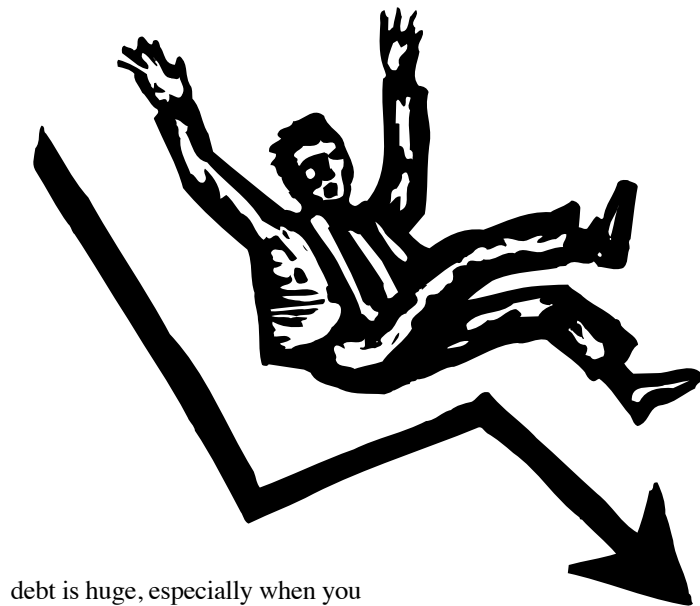
George H.W. Bush 1989-1992: \$1.34

George W. Bush 2001-2004: \$1.27

George W. Bush 2005-2007: \$1.24

Republican Average: \$1.29

The difference between \$1.16 and \$1.29 may not seem like a lot, but the impact on the national



debt is huge, especially when you consider that \$1.29 applies to 19 years, and the budgets under this president are so much larger.

Debt

Debt held by the public [\$US trillions]

Jimmy Carter, 1977-1980: 0.2

Bill Clinton, 1993-1996: 0.7

Bill Clinton, 1997-2000: -0.3

Democratic Total: 0.6

Ronald Reagan 1981-1984: 0.6

Ronald Reagan 1985-1988: 0.7

George H.W. Bush 1989-1992: 0.9

George W. Bush 2001-2004: 0.9

George W. Bush 2005-2007: 1.1

Republican Total: 4.3

The financial markets only pay attention to the amount of debt held by the public. This is the number that helps drive down the value of the dollar and makes bankers nervous about inflation down the road.

Debt held by government [\$US trillions]

Jimmy Carter, 1977-1980: 0.00

Bill Clinton, 1993-1996: 0.4

Bill Clinton, 1997-2000: 0.8

Democratic Total: 1.3

Ronald Reagan 1981-1984: 0.1

Ronald Reagan 1985-1988: 0.3

George H.W. Bush 1989-1992: 0.5

George W. Bush 2001-2004: 0.8

George W. Bush 2005-2007: 1.4

Republican Total: 3.0

Debt held in government

accounts is very much a misnomer. Debt, in the real world, is a fixed obligation to make a payment on a specific date. Not so for debt held in government accounts, according to this White House.

Social security

The Bush administration opposes including Social Security and Medicare in the audited deficit. Its reason: Congress can cancel or cut the retirement programs at any time, so they should not be considered a government liability for accounting purposes. This subject warrants a separate article, but, there, in a nutshell, is the basis for the Republicans' "Social Security Reform."

In very simple terms, what happens is that the money contributed by everyone into Social Security (intended to build up a surplus to fund the baby boomers' nest egg for their retirement years) is actually used to reduce the government's reported deficit.

Is it a huge scam? You bet. President Clinton, anticipating the problem, proposed some kind of undefined "lockbox" to prevent the pillaging of the Social Security surplus that's taken place under the current White House. Of course, the Republicans shot that down. So, anyone who speaks of a crisis in Social Security is really talking about a problem that can be laid at the Republicans' doorstep. It's not class warfare, just simple arithmetic.

David Fiderer, a former banker, writes about corporate and political corruption.

Source: *Huffington Post* 4/22/08 <http://www.huffingtonpost.com>

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The Visitor inspires action

Dale Steele

I watched an excellent movie yesterday. The simple plot, well acted out, drummed home a very important point: Freedom is not real unless everyone can participate in it.

As *The Visitor* shows only too well, that is certainly not the case now in our own country. A college professor going through the motion of living his empty life is in the midst of presenting a paper on globalization when he is suddenly confronted with some very real immigrants seeking a better life in NY and who enrich his in the process.

A chance moment in the subway suddenly changes everything for them and leads to one being detained without rights or basic

human considerations.

The story drives home how the treatment of immigrants has changed dramatically post 9/11. Due process has clearly been compromised.

A powerful message to us all is that we must stand up for each other if anyone is truly to be free. We also have to ask ourselves how far we are willing to go to "protect" our borders?

Watch the movie and see for yourself. If you find that you, too, need to do more afterwards, you can "Take Action Now" at <http://www.participate.org>.

This movie presents a very timely issue extremely well, and delivers a powerful message that will be much talked about. Don't stop there though. Participate!

Go film!

From June 9th to June 21st the GO FILM! Filmmaking workshop will provide a select group of local high school students with a unique opportunity to write, direct and edit two short films that will screen at the Stockton Empire Theater. The chosen students will be taught by two local award winning filmmakers Erahm Christopher and Shane Williamson and receive hands-on experience using professional digital video equipment. The GO FILM! workshop is generously funded by the City Endowment for the Arts grant through the Stockton Arts Commission. If you are interested, contact Shane Williamson, Videographer, Curriculum and Instructional Technology, San Joaquin County Office of Education, 2857 Transworld Dr., Stockton, CA 95206 (209) 969-2903

Kids College presents summer science fun

Looking for something meaningful for your children or grandchildren to do this summer?

Kids College is offering over 110 summer workshops for children and teens at Delta College in diverse subjects including Science, Academic Skills & Creative Learning, Arts & Crafts, Computers & Photography, Cooking, Dance & Movement, Foreign Language, Music, Personal Pursuits, Science & Engineering, Sign Language, Sports & Fitness, and Theatre.

The Delta Digest will be available at Delta College and in local libraries. Registration begins on Monday, May 19 in Holt 101. Early registration is encouraged as class sizes are small and fill quickly.

For information about the summer workshops, schedule, fees, and the registration process, please visit : kids.deltacollege.edu. or contact Beverley Dierking, Kids College coordinator at 209-954-5015.

2008 SJ Film Festival award nominees

June 4-8 is the 1st International San Joaquin Film Festival, a project of SJ Cross-Cultural Media (SJCCM). The region's first global film festival will feature 54 films from 18 nations; 35 events; and filmmakers and film lovers from near and far.

The theme is "Making History," with films highlighting stories of human migration, human rights, and coming-of-age.

The following films were nominated for the 2008 San Joaquin Film Festival Awards. Winners will be selected by jury and honored at the Festival Finale and Awards Gala on June 8 at 6:30 pm. A Pre-Finale Reception will be held at 4:45 pm at the President's Room at Pacific.

The nominated films:

Best narrative film

The Clown and the Fuhrer (Spain)
Vanaja (India)
The Garage (USA)
Rain in the Mountains (USA)

Best documentary

Rain Falls from Earth (USA-Cambodia)
The Farther, the Dearer (Northern Ireland)
The House on August Street (Israel)
Made in L.A. (USA)
Saving Luna (Canada)
To Touch the Soul (USA-Cambodia)

Best short film by a local filmmaker

Hem Lengths (USA)
Home-School (USA)
The Sidewalk (USA)
The Piano Lesson (Canada)

Best documentary short film

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Official Website
www.sjccm.org

144 dpi: Recommended for computer viewing

program guide

Broadcast Cowboy (USA)
Cabbie (USA)
Kuna Ni Nanang (USA)
Hero, Wings Are Not Necessary to Fly (Spain)

Best narrative short film

Aquarium (USA)
Partially True Tales (USA)
Sexy Thing (Australia)
The Golden Voice (USA-Cambodia)
Overnight, A Rose (Taiwan)
Tiffin (Malaysia)
Waves (Romania)

Best animated short film

Jungle Gym (USA)
Nazdravicko! (Slovakia)
The Goat That Ate Time (Australia)

My Happy End (Germany)

Best experimental short film

The Drift (USA)
Energy! (Germany)
Kuna Ni Nanang (USA)

Best student short film

Abridged (USA)
Applications (USA)
Aquarium (USA)
Overnight, A Rose (Taiwan)

For more information or tickets visit www.sjccm.org or call (209) 518-9882. For tickets to the Finale and Awards Gala and Pre-Reception, go to www.pacifictigers.tix.com or call the Box Office at (209) 946-2474.

Mediation training coming up

The culture of violence that surrounds us cries out for agents of change. Mediators, who take on the conflicts between parties and bring people together, make changes in angry lives. Mediations, where two parties work out their differences with the help of mediators, change how the disputants see the world. In the course of a mediation one

becomes sensitive to the views of others and learns how to settle disagreements peacefully. The Mediation Center is now offering a class in community mediation where our next graduates will bring these skills to angry and divided families, neighbors, and friends.

The Basic Mediation Training consists of four training days,

June 26-29 at the Mediation Center of San Joaquin, 829 Rose Marie Lane, Ste. D, Stockton. For more information on this training and/or the Center's other services, contact the Center at (209) 474-8794. For more information on the Mediation Center visit our website at www.MediatorsRus.org. Call now for an application, space is limited.

June Calendar

Editor's note: if your event isn't listed, let us know. Send all copy to: bgiudici@caltel.com by the 7th of every month.

May 6 - May 30

Student work exhibit. M-F 10-5, Sat 11-3 Tidewater Gallery, 223 E. Weber Ave, Stockton. 463-4033

May 18 - June 22

International Pastels USA Exhibition. Haggin Museum, 1201 N Pershing Ave, Stockton. 32 awards to be presented May 31, 2-4 pm. Wed-Sun 1:30 - 5 pm. 1st and 3rd Thurs 1:30 - 9 pm. \$5 adult 18 & older, student/senior/youth age 10-17 \$2.50. Under 10 free. 940-6300 info@hagginmuseum.org

June 3 - July 5

Digital works by photographer Dennis Merrill. M-F 10-5, Sat 11-3 Tidewater Gallery, 223 E. Weber Ave, Stockton. 463-4033

June 18 - July 13

The Full Monty, Thu 7:30 pm, Fri-Sat 8 pm, Sun 2:30 pm. Stockton Civic Theatre, 2312 Rose Marie Lane, Stockton \$12 - \$22. 473-2424.

Fri, May 23

A Gem in the Park play presented by KUDOS Children's Theatre Company, Haggin Museum, Victory Park. An original musical spotlighting the Haggin. 6 and 7 pm. Free. 948-1858. www.kudosct.com

Mon, May 26

Delta-Sierra Club meeting, 7 pm, Central United Methodist Church, Fireside Room, 3700 Pacific Ave, Stockton, 7pm program with social time following. All Welcome.

Tue, May 27

Candlelight prayer vigil for peace, Annunciation Cathedral, Lincoln/Rose in Stockton. We pray to become people of peace, so wars will end. All are welcome. 7 PM sharp. Info: Ria deGroot, 462-3340.

Thu, May 29

Senior Awareness Day, Micke Grove Zoo and Park, 11793 N Micke Grove Rd, Lodi. 8 am - 1 pm. Entertainment, food booths and over 100 informational booths. 468-1374. Free admission.

Sat, May 31

Waldo Music Fest, noon - 6 pm+. Calaveras Riverbank, 3536 Ranier Ave, Stockton featuring Dirk Hamilton, Stringin Along and Dave Halford. \$25 donation goes toward habitat conservation in the Delta.

Blues in the Park, 7pm, Waterloo Gun & Bocci Blub, 4343 N Ashley Lane, Stockton featuring Shad Harris & The Groovenators, The Jeff Watson Band and Zakiya Hooker - daughter of Blues Legend John Lee Hooker. \$15 advance, \$20 door. 209-610-8187

Sun, June 1

Temple Israel Food Fair, 9:30 - 3:30 pm. March Lane & El Dorado. Food, music, kid's activities, dancing, entertainment. Free admission, \$10 brunch. 477-9306.

Wed, June 4

San Joaquin Film Festival '08 Opening Night Gala, Fox Theatre, 242 E Main St, Stockton. 54 films, 18 nations, 35 festival events including film competition, artist forum, and awards running through June 8. 209-298-0827 www.sjccm.org

Concert in the Park features RB/X, Victory Park, Pershing & Argonne, Stockton. 6-8 pm. Free. 937-8099

Thu, June 5

Peace and Justice Network monthly meeting, 231 Bedford Rd, Stockton. 6 pm Board, 7 pm program. All welcome.

Wed, June 11

Concert in the Park features Valley Concert Band, Victory Park, Pershing & Argonne, Stockton. 6-8 pm. Free admission. 937-8099

Sat, June 14

"Filipinos in Stockton" book discussion by author Dr. Dawn Mabalon. Chavez Central Library, 605 N El Dorado, Stockton. 2 pm. Free admission. 937-8221.

Wed, June 18

Concert in the Park features Steve Trucco's Band, Victory Park, Pershing & Argonne, Stockton. 6-8 pm. Free admission. 937-8099

Sat, June 21

Ragtime at Ola's Exotic Coffee at the Chavez Library, 605 N El Dorado, Stockton. Porcupine Ragtime Ensemble including Robin Truitt Drivon (tuba) and Steve Drivon (trombone). 2 pm. Free. 931-8221.

Tue, June 24

Candlelight prayer vigil for peace, Annunciation Cathedral, Lincoln/Rose in Stockton. We pray to become people of peace, so wars will end. All are welcome. 7 PM sharp. Info: Ria deGroot, 462-3340.

Mondays

Groovenators w/Shad Harris west coast blues, Chivita's Bar & Grill, 445 W Weber Ave, Stockton. 7 - 11 pm. \$3 cover.

Thursdays:

Peace demonstrations continue to grow: 5 till 6:30 PM, grassy edge of Delta campus along Pacific Avenue, north of light and bus stop at Yokuts, across from Sherwood. Free mall parking. Signs provided, or bring your own. Info John Morearty, 464-3326.

Infinite Harmony & Reiki Healing Network. Come and receive a Reiki mini session to heal Body, Mind and Spirit. Spiritual Truth Center, 4545 Georgetown Pl, Stockton, 95207. 7:30-9 pm. \$10 donation. 983-9633

Fridays

Downtown farmers market, Hunter Square & E Main, Stockton. 9 am - 2 pm. 464-5246

First Sundays

Vegan potluck, Peace & Justice Center,

231 Bedford Rd, Stockton. 5:30 pm \$2 donation bringing food, \$9 without. Info: sjvegans@hotmail.com.

First & third Tuesdays

Stockton Writers Community workshop, Chavez Library, 605 N El Dorado St, Stockton. 6 pm. Free workshops designed for people writing fiction, non-fiction or poetry. 937-8221

First Thursdays

Experimental & improv music, 8 pm Blackwater Cafe, 914 N Yosemite, Stockton. \$3. 943-6938.

Third Thursdays

Hispanics for Political Action - HPA meets 6 pm at 2080 E 4th St, Stockton. Info, call Louis Gonzales 464-9205

Fourth Saturdays

Greater Lodi Area Democrats (GLAD) meets 8:30 a.m., Dee Dee's Restaurant, 1170 S. Cherokee Ln, Lodi. All welcome, including recovering Republicans. 339-1599.

Come to Peace Camp 2008!

Ken Schroeder

June 26-28 will mark the 26th year that peace-minded folks will meet in the Sierras at Camp Peaceful Pines. Peace Camp was organized by the Modesto Peace/Life Center to provide a weekend for families to meet for fellowship, relaxation, nature, and nurture. The weekend will offer workshops, hiking, campfire, star walk, singing, talent show, children's activities and delicious, healthy meals.

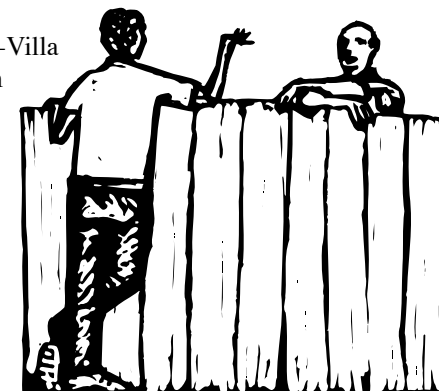
This year's camp features Israel, Palestine and the U.S, a multi-media presentation by Dan Onorato, retired instructor of English and Spanish at Modesto Junior College. Dan spent two weeks in Israel-Palestine in August 2005. His presentation features Israelis and Palestinians who are working courageously for peace and reconciliation. Dan traveled through the region with the Interfaith Peace Builders, an affiliate of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. His many years studying the conflict and his long history of nonviolent action make him uniquely qualified to give a perspective on this issue.

The workshop Youth Activism: Organizing across Generations will

feature William Broderick-Villa and Brianne Parmer. William is the mayor of Waterford and a high school teacher. He attended Peace Camp as a child. At age 24 he was elected to the Waterford Council. Brianne, a student at Modesto Junior College, has advocated for peace, for immigrant rights and for gay rights. Brianne has been president of PRISM at MJC, where she has been active in student government. As a child she also attended Peace Camp where, at the age of 12, she gave a presentation on the issue of a national missile defense system.

About Camp Peaceful Pines

At the 6,200-foot elevation in the Stanislaus National Forest on the Clark Fork of the Stanislaus River, Camp Peaceful Pines is located about 25 miles above Pinecrest off Hwy 108. Surrounded by tall peaks, the camp has a creek running through it. The morning brings a quality of sunlight found only in the Sierras and the night brings an awesome sky full of stars. The Clark Fork and Sunrise Rock, with views of the river valley, are short walks from camp.



The camp features kitchen and bathing facilities, rustic cabins and platform tents (unheated) and a cabin for those with special needs. Campers share in meal preparation, cleanup, and other work. All are welcome.

The \$70 fee covers program, food and lodging. Young people are \$50. Early registration, before June 8th, entitles registrants to a \$10 per person discount. Partial financial aid and day rates are also available. Registration forms are available at www.stanislausconnections.org.

Information: Ken Schroeder in Modesto, 209-526-2303 or Marilyn Dungan in Sonora, 209-533-3516.

Peace Camp is organized by the Modesto Peace/Life Center in collaboration with Tuolumne County Citizens for Peace.

Talking It Through

Talking It Through is now two half-hour shows.

The Real Show hosted by Margee Ensign is on Monday at 6pm

Talking It Through is hosted by Adrian Nichols and Sammy Nunez every Monday evening at 6:30pm

SJTV: Stockton, Lodi and Manteca cable channel 26

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Introducing the Waldo Holt Wildlife Conservancy

Marj Fries

The Waldo Holt San Joaquin Wildlife Conservancy, <http://www.waldoconservancy.org>, honors the conservation values Waldo dedicated his life to through the purchase of good habitat land. Waldo studied and loved birds. His passion was to preserve the natural riches of this Great Central Valley to sustain the flyway, nesting and foraging habits of these wild animals. The Waldo Holt San Joaquin Wildlife Conservancy enables us as a community to complete that vision by purchasing and dedicating into perpetuity those sustaining lands.

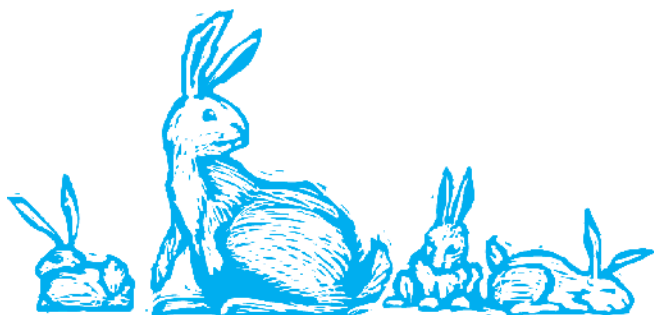
The website has information on the strategies and goals of

the WaldoConservancy. Please call or email me if you have any questions or comments.

We are building a database. If you would like to be included, please reply to friends@waldoconservancy.org with your email address.

May 31st, is the date for the First Waldo Music Fest and though this is a fundraiser, this will be a low-key FUNdraiser. Please twist your own arm!

If you can't make the Music Fest, but want to make a tax-deductible contribution to the Waldo Holt San Joaquin Wildlife Conservancy, make checks payable to Rose Foundation/Waldo Holt Fund, PO Box 4073, Stockton, CA 95204.



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Java Aroma/Empire Theatre, 1825 Pacific Ave.
Blackwater Annex, 13 S. San Joaquin St.

INFO: Eric at (209) 462-4808 or
email MusicFest@waldoconservancy.org

DONATION AT THE DOOR \$25, or MUCH MORE.
Donations to this fund are tax-deductible to the full extent allowed by law.

*a nonprofit organization dedicated to the conservation legacy of Waldo Holt through the purchase of wildlife habitat. Go to <http://www.waldoconservancy.org> for more information.

THE ROSE FOUNDATION FOR COMMUNITIES AND THE ENVIRONMENT has set up a special fund to help the Waldo Holt Conservancy raise tax-deductible contributions to preserve sensitive habitat in San Joaquin County. Donations to this fund are tax deductible to the full extent allowed by law. Make your donation payable to: Rose Foundation/Waldo Holt Fund.

For more information about the Rose Foundation and its programs, please visit www.rosefdn.org.



Gay marriage victory!!

We won the marriage case in California. No need for hyperbole here; this is big!

Simply having the California Supreme Court say that constitutional principles demand that marriage be open to same-sex couples is an enormous win. This Court has a remarkable history of leadership on civil rights and civil liberties. It made landmark decisions on race and sex discrimination, on freedom of speech and privacy, and on treatment of the disabled and

poor people long before the U.S. Supreme Court. No court in America has more authority to say that marriage for same-sex couples is an issue of basic freedom. As the *New York Times* recently pointed out, the California Supreme Court is the most influential state high court in America.

The case was brought by the ACLU, the National Center for Lesbian Rights, Lambda Legal and the City of San Francisco. The decision was 4 to 3.

Now we have to hold on to this

victory. It appears fairly certain that anti-gay forces have gotten enough signatures to put an initiative on the November ballot to amend the State Constitution and overrule the decision. If we win the initiative, however, marriage in California will have a popular stamp of approval.

But for today, let's just revel in one of the greatest wins in our history.

Source: ACLU release 5/15/08, ACLU, 125 Broad Street, 18th Floor New York, NY 10004 www.aclu.org