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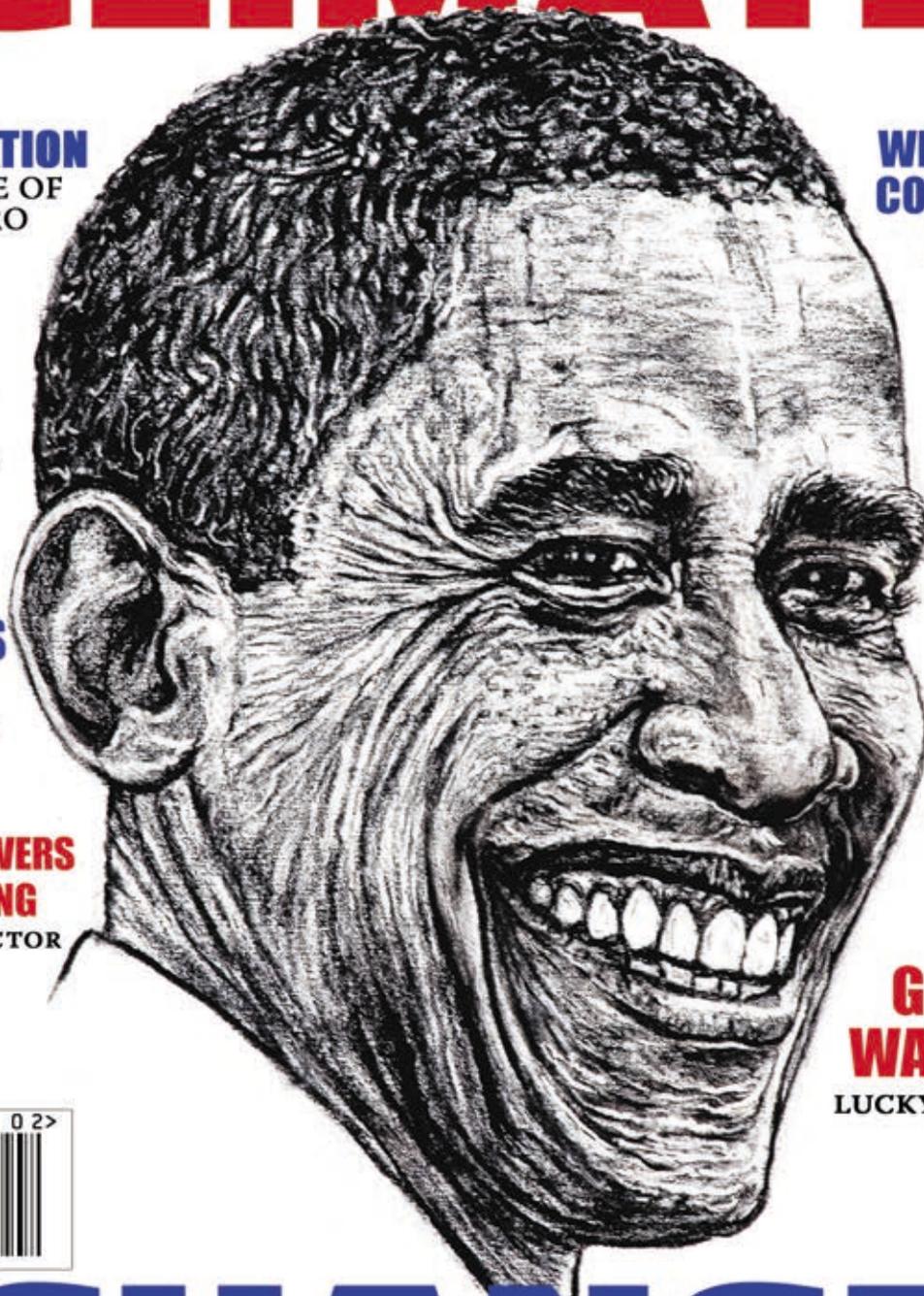
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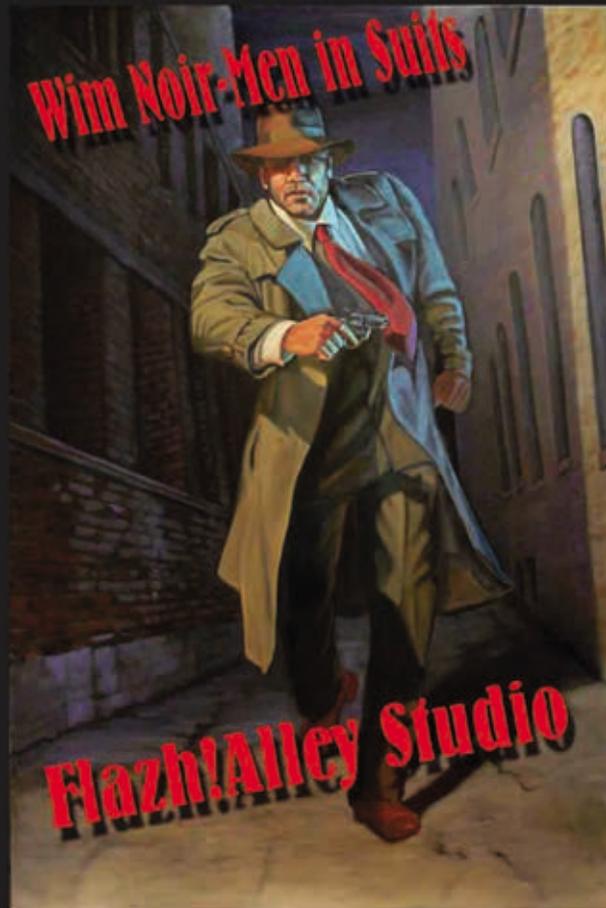
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Issue 30  
Volume 13  
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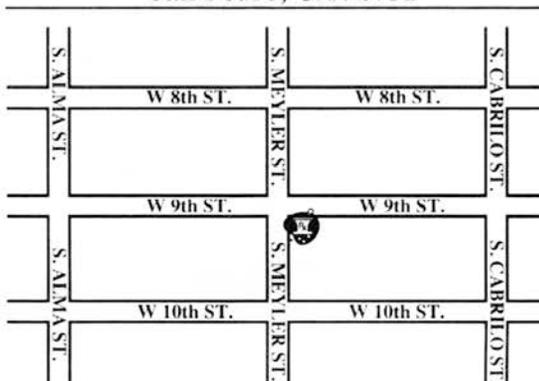
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# AMASS

**ISSUE 30**  
**VOLUME 13**  
NUMBER 2

ELECTION

## **MEMO TO OBAMA: MOVING TO THE MIDDLE IS FOR LOSERS**

ARIANNA HUFFINGTON

8

CLIMATE

## **DEFINING MOMENT FOR CLIMATE CHANGE**

BILL MCKIBBEN

12

ECONOMY

## **DEMISE OF ADOLESCENT AMERICA**

CAROLYN BAKER

16

## **EMERGENCY BEHAVIOR**

JAMES KUNSTLER

20

CONSTITUTION

## **THE SHOWDOWN BETWEEN CONGRESS AND THE COG**

PETER DALE SCOTT

23

WAR CONTRACTING

## **WAR CONTRACTOR FRAUD SUITS**

MATT RENNER

26

HEALTH CARE

## **RIISING HEALTH CARE COSTS CAUSING SERIOUS ECONOMIC WOES**

JASON LEOPOLD

29

## **HEALTH CARE AND REAL REFORM**

ROSE ANN DEMORO

33

INTERVIEW

## **SAN PEDRO PROGRESS: INTERVIEW WITH JANICE HAHN**

JOHN O'KANE

35

JOURNALISM

## **THE HEDONISTS OF POWER**

CHRIS HEDGES

38

ENERGY

## **DON'T DRINK THE NUCLEAR KOOL-AID**

AMY GOODMAN

39

SPORTS

## **TIGER, TIGER, BURNING BLIGHT**

DAVE ZIRIN

39

EULOGY

## **LANGUAGE GAMES: THE LEGACY OF GEORGE CARLIN**

PETER LAVENIA

40

ART REVIEW

## **CONTROVERSY AT AZUL**

RON LINDEN

42

FILM REVIEW

## **JOHN CUSACK'S WAR**

JEREMY SCAHILL

43

# AMASS

**EDITOR:**

JOHN O'KANE

**ASSISTANT EDITORS:**

MARK MAYHEW  
JOAN GLEASON  
VICKI JENKINS

**DESIGNER:**

AMELIA MULKEY

**MANAGING EDITOR:**

MOLLIKA RAY

**INTERNS:**

ELENA SANCHEZ  
GLEN OSWALD

**CONTRIBUTORS:**

NOAM CHOMSKY  
ROBBIE CONAL  
MARC COOPER  
NANCY FRASER  
SUSANNA HECHT  
ARIANNA HUFFINGTON  
JAY KUGELMAN  
DOUGLAS KELLNER  
PAUL KRASSNER  
JASON LEOPOLD  
RON LINDEN  
PHILOMENE LONG  
AMELIA MULKEY  
ERIKA ROTHENBERG  
PETER DALE SCOTT  
SANDRA TSING-LOH

**COVER:**

"CLIMATE CHANGE"  
ROBBIE CONAL

6 **AMASS**

# CLIMATE



# CHANGE

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# MEMO TO OBAMA: MOVING TO THE MIDDLE IS FOR LOSERS

ARIANNA HUFFINGTON

Last Friday afternoon, the guests taking part in Sunday's roundtable discussion on *This Week* had a pre-show call with George Stephanopoulos. One of the topics he raised was Obama's perceived move to the center, and what it means. Thus began my weekend obsession. If you were within shouting distance of me, odds are we talked about it. I talked about it over lunch with HuffPost's DC team, over dinner with friends, with the doorman at the hotel, and the driver on the way driver to the airport.

As part of this process, I looked at the Obama campaign not through the prism of my own progressive views and beliefs but through the prism of a cold-eyed campaign strategist who has no principles except winning. From that point of view, and taking nothing else into consideration, I can unequivocally say: the Obama campaign is making a very serious mistake. Tacking to the center is a losing strategy. And don't let the latest head-to-head poll numbers lull you the way they lulled Hillary Clinton in December.

Running to the middle in an attempt to attract undecided swing voters didn't work for Al Gore in 2000. It didn't work for John Kerry in 2004. And it didn't work when Mark Penn (obsessed with his "microtrends" and missing the megatrend) convinced Hillary Clinton to do it in 2008.

Fixating on--and pandering to--this fickle crowd is all about messaging tailored to avoid offending rather than to inspire and galvanize. And isn't galvanizing the electorate to demand fundamental change the *raison d'être*

of the Obama campaign in the first place? This is how David Axelrod put it at the end of February, contrasting the tired Washington model of "I'll do these things for you" with Obama's "Let's do these things together":

"This has been the premise of Barack's politics all his life, going back to his days as a community organizer. He has really lived and breathed it, which is why it comes across so authentically. Of course, the time also has to be right for the man and the moment to come together. And, after all the country has been through over the last seven years, the times are definitely right for the message that the only way to get real change is to activate the American people to demand it."

Watering down that brand is the political equivalent of New Coke. Call it Obama Zero.

In 2004, the Kerry campaign's obsession with undecided voters--voters so easily swayed that 46 percent of them found credible the Swift Boaters' charges that Kerry might have faked his war wounds to earn a Purple Heart--allowed the race to devolve from a referendum on the future of the country into a petty squabble over whether Kerry had bled enough to warrant his medals.

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Obama brand  
has always been about  
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and "change we can  
believe in."**

Throughout the primary, Obama referred to himself as an "unlikely candidate." Which he certainly was, and still is. And one of the things that turned him from "unlikely" upstart to presidential frontrunner is his ability to expand the electorate by convincing unlikely voters--some of the 83 million eligible voters who didn't turn out in 2004--to engage in the system.

So why start playing to the political fence sitters--staking out newly nuanced positions on FISA, gun control laws, expansion of the death penalty, and NAFTA?

In an interview with Nina Easton in *Fortune* Magazine, Obama was asked about having called NAFTA "a big mistake"

and "devastating." Obama's reply: "Sometimes during campaigns the rhetoric gets overheated and amplified."

Overheated? So when he was campaigning in the Midwest, many parts of which have been, yes, devastated by economic changes since the passage of NAFTA, and he pledged to make use of a six-month opt-out clause in the trade agreement, that was "overheated?" Or was that one "amplified?"

Because if that's the case, it would be helpful going forward if Obama would let us know which of his

powerful rhetoric is “overheated” and/or “amplified,” so voters will know not to get their hopes too high.

When Obama kneecaps his own rhetoric and dilutes his positioning as a different kind of politician, he is also giving his opponent a huge opening to reassert the McCain as Maverick brand. We know that McCain has completely abandoned any legitimate claim on his maverick image, but the echoes of that reputation are still very much with us--especially among many in the media who would love nothing more than to be able to once again portray McCain as the real leader they fell in love with in 2000. And the new Straight Talk Express plane has been modeled on its namesake bus, decked out to better recreate the seduction.

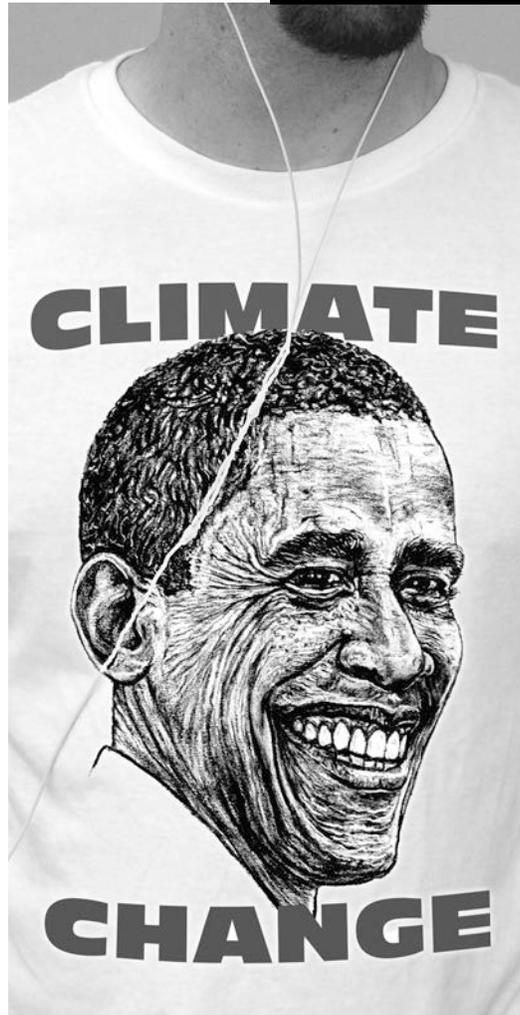
The transition between the primaries and the general election--and from insurgent to frontrunner--is tricky. Even a confident campaign can be knocked off course. So this is when Obama most needs to remember what got him to this point--and stick with it.

In a *Los Angeles Times* article detailing Obama's attempts at “shifting toward the center,” Matt Bennett of the centrist think tank Third Way says that Obama is a “good politician. He's doing all he can to make sure people know he would govern as a post-partisan moderate.”

But isn't being a “good politician” as it's meant here exactly what Obama defined himself as being against? Instead of Third Way think tankers, Obama should listen to this guy:

“What's stopped us is the failure of leadership, the smallness of our politics--the ease with which we're distracted by the petty and trivial, our chronic avoidance of tough decisions, our preference for scoring cheap political points instead of rolling up our sleeves and building a working consensus to tackle big problems....The time for that politics is over. It's time to turn the page.”

That was Barack Obama in February of 2007, announcing his run for the White House. “I know I haven't



Photoby Amelia Mulkey.  
Artwork on tee-shirt by Robbie Conal

## Watering down that brand is the political equivalent of New Coke. Call it Obama Zero.

spent a lot of time learning the ways of Washington,” he said that day, “but I've been there long enough to know that the ways of Washington must change.”

Was that just “overheated and amplified” rhetoric?

The Obama brand has always been about inspiration, a new kind of politics, the audacity of hope, and “change we can believe in.” I like that brand. More importantly, voters--especially unlikely voters--like that brand.

Pulling it off the shelf and replacing it with a political product geared to pleasing America's vacillating swing voters--the ones who will be most susceptible to the fear-mongering avalanche that has already begun--would be a fatal blunder.

Realpolitik is one thing. Realstupidpolitik is quite another.

So, to counter the conventional wisdom pundits, the cautious campaign advisers, and his own inner cautiousness, I'm offering Obama the following suggestions for staying true to the vision and message that took him from longshot “unlikely candidate” to presidential frontrunner--and for avoiding the fate of the many before him who fell prey to the misguided belief that the path to the White House runs down the middle of the road.

1) Load up your Kindle with passages from leaders who were looking to fundamentally change the country and following an inner compass, not the latest focus-group results. Bobby Kennedy and Martin Luther King would be a good place to start.

“Some men see things as they are and ask, ‘Why?’ I dream of things that never were and ask, ‘Why not?’” (RFK)

“There comes a time when one must take the position that is neither safe nor politic nor popular, but he must do it because conscience tells him it is right.” (MLK)

2) Load up your iPod with passages from your own speeches. They've inspired others; now let them re-ignite the inspirational leader in you.

"This campaign can't only be about me. It must be about us--it must be about what we can do together. This campaign must be the occasion, the vehicle, of your hopes, and your dreams. It will take your time, your energy, and your advice to push us forward when we're doing right, and to let us know when we're not. This campaign has to be about reclaiming the meaning of citizenship, restoring our sense of common purpose, and realizing that few obstacles can withstand the power of millions of voices calling for change....That's why I'm in this race. Not just to hold an office, but to gather with you to transform a nation."

3) Get your campaign to give you a printout of the names of the over 1.5 million people who have donated to your campaign (at an average of \$197 each). Give that list a read every day; feel the heft. And remember that the tried-and-untrue swing voter strategy is what has led to the Democratic Party's prolonged identity crisis. Forget the fence sitters. Instead, continue to speak to those who have turned their backs on the electoral process--those who are struggling without health care, without decent schools, without jobs, without hope.

4) Tape to your mirror the poll results from July 2004, where Kerry was up by six, and June of 1988, where Dukakis was up by 15...and don't get complacent.

5) Go to YouTube and watch the concession speeches of Kerry, Gore, and Hillary Clinton, each of whom decided

to run to the middle in an attempt to attract undecided swing voters

6) Don't let the daily petty squabbles of the campaign distract you from the core message that this campaign is not a referendum on John McCain's war record or the level of your patriotism--but rather on the future of America. Are we a nation driven by hope and promise or a nation driven by fear?

When Bobby Kennedy was agonizing over whether or not to run in 1968, he told one of his advisors: "People are selfish. But they can also be compassionate and generous, and they care about the country. But not when they feel threatened. That's why this is such a crucial time. We can go in either direction. But if we don't make a choice soon, it will be too late to turn things around. I think people are willing to make the right choice. But they need leadership. They're hungry for leadership."

Forty years later, we are starving for it. Real leadership, not a poll-driven facsimile. Not swing-state, swing-voter leadership. Leadership defined by an ability to capture our imagination and a willingness to challenge us. Leadership geared to transforming the country through the audacity of hope instead of keeping it mired in the politics of fear and division.

7) Heed the old Texas advice of Dandy Don Meredith and Molly Ivins: "You got to dance with them what brung you."

Voters longing for hope, inspiration, a new kind of politics, and fundamental change are "them that brung you" to the big dance. Don't let the pundits, the advisors, and the cowards convince you to let someone else cut in.



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# DEFINING MOMENT FOR CLIMATE CHANGE

BILL MCKIBBEN

**E**ven for Americans, constitutionally convinced that there will always be a second act, and a third, and a do-over after that, and, if necessary, a little public repentance and forgiveness and a Brand New Start--even for us, the world looks a little Terminal right now.

It's not just the economy. We've gone through swoons before. It's that gas near \$5 a gallon means we're running out, at least of the cheap stuff that built our sprawling society. It's that when we try to turn corn into gas, it sends the price of a loaf of bread shooting upwards and starts food riots on three continents. It's that everything is so inextricably tied together. It's that, all of a sudden, those grim Club of Rome types who, way back in the 1970s, went on and on about the "limits to growth" suddenly seem, how best to put it, right. All of a sudden it isn't morning in America, it's dusk on planet Earth.

There's a number--a new number--that makes this point most powerfully. It may now be the most important number on Earth: 350. As in parts per million (ppm) of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

A few weeks ago, our foremost climatologist, NASA's Jim Hansen, submitted a paper to *Science* magazine with several co-authors. The abstract attached to it argued--and I have never read stronger language in a scientific paper--"if humanity wishes to preserve a planet similar to that on which civilization developed and to

which life on earth is adapted, paleoclimate evidence and ongoing climate change suggest that CO<sub>2</sub> will need to be reduced from its current 385 ppm to at most 350 ppm." Hansen cites six irreversible tipping points--massive sea level rise and huge changes in rainfall patterns, among them--that we'll pass if we don't get back down to 350 soon; and the first of them, judging by last summer's insane melt of Arctic ice, may already be behind us.

So it's a tough diagnosis. It's like the doctor telling you that your cholesterol is way too high and, if you don't bring it down right away, you're going to have a stroke. So you take the pill, you swear off the cheese, and, if you're lucky, you get back into the safety zone before the coronary. It's like watching the tachometer edge into the red zone and knowing that you need to take your foot off the gas before you hear that clunk up front.

In this case, though, it's worse than that because we're not taking the pill and we are stomping on the gas--hard. Instead of slowing down, we're pouring on the coal, quite literally. Two weeks ago came the news that atmospheric carbon dioxide had jumped 2.4 parts per million last year--

two decades ago, it was going up barely half that fast.

And suddenly, the news arrives that the amount of methane, another potent greenhouse gas, accumulating in the atmosphere, has unexpectedly begun to soar as well. Apparently, we've managed to

warm the far north enough to start melting huge

patches of permafrost and massive quantities of methane trapped beneath it have begun to bubble forth.

And don't forget: China is building more power plants; India is pioneering the \$2,500 car, and Americans are converting to TVs the size of windshields which suck juice ever faster.

Here's the thing. Hansen didn't just say that, if we didn't act, there was trouble coming; or, if we didn't yet know what was best for us, we'd certainly be better off below 350 ppm of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. His



Rajendra Pachauri Nobel Prize winner, scientist, and economist,  
Photo by Associated Press

phrase was: “if we wish to preserve a planet similar to that on which civilization developed.” A planet with billions of people living near those oh-so-floodable coastlines. A planet with ever more vulnerable forests. (A beetle, encouraged by warmer temperatures, has already managed to kill 10 times more trees than in any previous infestation across the northern reaches of Canada this year. This means far more carbon heading for the atmosphere and apparently dooms Canada’s efforts to comply with the Kyoto Protocol, already in doubt because of its decision to start producing oil for the U.S. from Alberta’s tar sands.)

We’re the ones who kicked the warming off; now, the planet is starting to take over the job. Melt all that Arctic ice, for instance, and suddenly the nice white shield that reflected 80% of incoming solar radiation back into space has turned to blue water that absorbs 80% of the sun’s heat. Such feedbacks are beyond history, though not in the sense that Francis Fukuyama had in mind.

And we have, at best, a few years to short-circuit them--to reverse course. Here’s the Indian scientist and economist Rajendra Pachauri, who accepted the Nobel Prize on behalf of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change last year (and, by the way, got his job when the Bush administration, at the behest of Exxon Mobil, forced out his predecessor): “If there’s no action before 2012, that’s too late. What we do in the next two to three years will determine our future. This is the defining moment.”

In the next two or three years, the nations of the world are supposed to be negotiating a successor treaty to Kyoto. When December 2009 rolls around, heads of state are supposed to converge on Copenhagen to sign a treaty--a treaty that would go into effect at the last plausible moment to heed the most basic and crucial of limits on atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub>.

If we did everything right, says Hansen, we could see carbon emissions start to fall fairly rapidly and the oceans begin to pull some of that CO<sub>2</sub> out of the atmosphere. Before the century was out we might even be on track back to 350. We might stop just short of some of those tipping points, like the Road Runner screeching to a halt at the very edge of the cliff.

More likely, though, we’re the Coyote--because “doing everything right” means that political systems around the world would have to take enormous and painful steps right away. It means no more new coal-fired power

plants anywhere, and plans to quickly close the ones already in operation. (Coal-fired power plants operating the way they’re supposed to are, in global warming terms, as dangerous as nuclear plants melting down.) It means making car factories turn out efficient hybrids next year, just the way we made them turn out tanks in six months at the start of World War II. It means making trains an absolute priority and planes a taboo.

It means making every decision wisely because we have so little time and so little money, at least relative to the task at hand. And hardest of all, it means the rich countries of the world sharing resources and technology freely with the poorest ones, so that they can develop dignified lives without burning their cheap coal.

That’s possible--we launched a Marshall Plan once, and we could do it again, this time in relation to carbon. But at a time when the President has, once more, urged us to drill in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, that seems unlikely. At a time when the alluring phrase “gas tax holiday” has danced into our vocabulary, it’s hard to see (though it was encouraging to see that Clinton’s gambit didn’t sway many voters). And if it’s hard to imagine sacrifice here, imagine China, where people produce a quarter as much carbon apiece as we do.

Still, as long as it’s not impossible, we’ve got a duty to try. In fact, it’s about the most obvious duty humans have ever faced.

A few of us have just launched a new campaign,

350.org. Its only goal is to spread this number around the world in the next 18 months, via art and music and ruckuses of all kinds, in the hope that it will push those post-Kyoto negotiations in the direction of reality. After all, those talks are our last chance; you just can’t do this one light bulb at a time. And if this 350.org campaign is a Hail Mary pass, well, sometimes those passes get caught.

We do have one thing going for us, this new tool the Web, which at least allows you to imagine something like a grassroots global effort. If the internet was built for anything, it was built for sharing this number, for making people understand that “350” stands for a kind of safety, a kind of possibility, a kind of future.

Hansen’s words were well-chosen: “a planet simi-

**“if humanity wishes to preserve a planet similar to that on which civilization developed and to which life on earth is adapted, paleoclimate evidence and ongoing climate change suggest that CO<sub>2</sub> will need to be reduced from its current 385 ppm to at most 350 ppm.”**

**-Rajendra Pachauri**  
Nobel Prize winner, scientist, and economist

lar to that on which civilization developed." People will doubtless survive on a non-350 planet, but those who do will be so preoccupied, coping with the endless unintended consequences of an overheated planet, that civilization may not. Civilization is what grows up in the margins of leisure and security provided by a workable relationship

with the natural world. That margin won't exist, at least not for long, this side of 350. That's the limit we face.

Bill McKibben's recent book is *The Bill McKibben Reader*.

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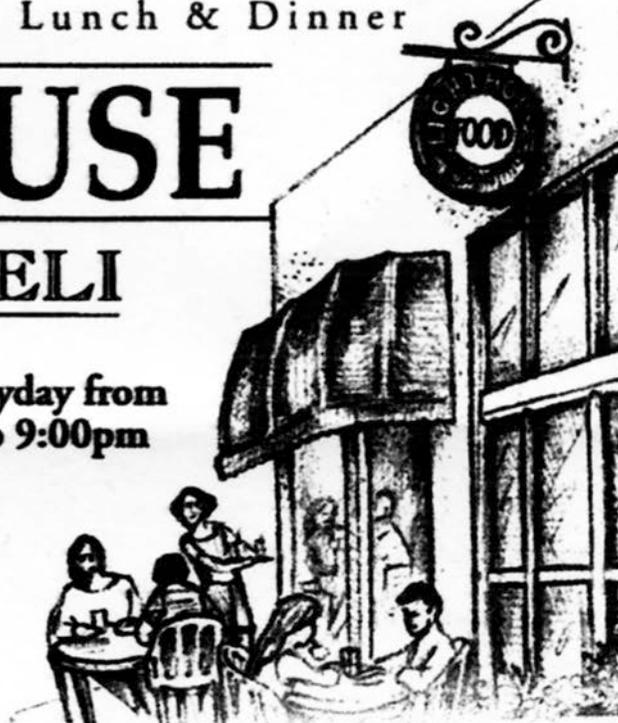
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# DEMISE OF ADOLESCENT AMERICA

CAROLYN BAKER

**W**ell here it is folks, the great unraveling so many of us have been forecasting during the past five years as we've read the tea leaves and researched the unprecedented convergence of myriad natural, political, economic, and environmental realities. As most of you know, I'm traveling, yes on the road, across this country. I was going to wait until arriving at my final destination before writing about my experience, but with oil rapidly heading for \$200 a barrel, it feels important to do so sooner rather than later because our lives have just changed more dramatically than we can imagine, and we will only be able to comprehend to what extent as the repercussions of the end of the age of oil reverberate through what is left of industrial civilization.

In my travels I've seen exactly one RV on the road, a few SUVs and vans, a number of small cars and motorcycles, and lots of eighteen-wheelers going 55 miles per hour. Motels have a record low number of guests, and few people are eating in restaurants. I thought about writing an article entitled "Ghost Town USA: Echo Across America," but that was before oil reached another new record yesterday.

The speed of collapse is taking even a seasoned collapse-watcher like me by somewhat of a surprise, and I feel compelled to talk about it as it unfolds.

Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of what we are witnessing, and there are oh so many, is the ubiquitousness of blame. Attending almost every report on skyrocketing gas prices is the question: "So whose fault is it?" I certainly am not surprised by this, but I find it unsettling to say the least. Because Americans in particular have been absolutely recalcitrant and incapable of looking at collapse, they are being and will continue to be increasingly blindsided by it. Sadly, when humans are traumatized, their functioning becomes progressively more primal and animal-like, and their capacity for taking in and assimilating

new information is markedly reduced.

When Peak Oil experts first began sharing their research, they told us that food, perhaps more than any aspect of our lives, would be impacted by it, and so it is. The double-barreled trauma now hitting Americans which is putting both gasoline and food out of their reach, is certain to result in reactive, vindictive behavior that will irrationally target a plethora of scapegoats. Add to this a foreclosure or two, a bankruptcy, car repossession, job loss or loss of health insurance and you have a recipe for mayhem. Such behavior, understandable as it may be, is adolescent in nature and therefore, untempered and unwisened, making acting-out individuals exceedingly dangerous to themselves and others.

Like me, you are probably witnessing the barrage of blame in your community and nationally if you are paying attention to mainstream news. Dmitry Orlov has given us a treasure-trove of information about human behavior in the throes of collapse chaos. What is and will be different from the collapse of the Soviet Union for Americans,

however, is the level of violence that is likely to proliferate as collapse accelerates. Russians were never intoxicated with affluence and entitlement as Americans are. Their history has been replete with suffering; ours marinated in privilege reinforced by gun culture and firearm fetishes.

What those of us who comprehend collapse must understand as we navigate the daunting days ahead is that what is happening to America and the human species is an initiatory experience similar to those which have been structured and honored by indigenous peoples for thousands of years. The very best explanation I have read of this process is *Nature And The Human Soul: Cultivating Wholeness And Community In A Fragmented World*

(2007), an extraordinary book by psychologist Bill Plotkin in which he illuminates the stages of human development and emphasizes how they have been skewed by a capitalistic, consumer-driven culture—and how each stage might be lived in fulfillment in the context of a holistic community. The current planetary initiation differs from the traditional, tribal initiation in that the former is involuntary and unwanted, whereas the latter is perceived as essential for the well being of the initiate and the tribe.

In tribal cultures young people have the opportunity to experience ritual rites of passage from adolescence to adulthood, that is, an initiation which involves some type of ordeal created and supported by the tribe's elders. Ordeals may include rugged endurance challenges in the wilderness, treacherous hunting experiences, or isolation for a period of time in nature. In all instances, the experi-

**...Americans in particular have been absolutely recalcitrant and incapable of looking at collapse, they are being and will continue to be increasingly blindsided by it.**

ence is one of discomfort and danger and literally sets up a brush with death for the initiate. Many traditional societies, and some psychologists such as Carl Jung, believe that the human psyche requires initiatory experiences in order to develop in a functional manner and that without them, one's emotional and spiritual development is impaired.

Since cultures are comprised of individuals, it follows that when the individuals of the culture have not been initiated, the culture itself is likely to remain in an adolescent state. Many cultures that have experienced collective suffering such as protracted wars, famines, and disease have in the process experienced a collective initiation which may produce some of the results of an individual initiation. This may be the reason that some European countries that endured two world wars appear to have a more mature relationship with the earth community. For example, many of those countries are far more aware of environmental issues and have taken more profound steps to live consciously in harmony with the ecosystem as noted in a recent National Geographic survey which ranks the US last in environmentally conscious behavior.

I believe that the collapse of civilization, now accelerating at a dizzying speed, is indeed a collective, planetary initiation of the human species. It involves all of us, not just those "clueless Americans out there," and it will deliver to each of us countless unwanted ordeals on every level--physical, emotional, financial, social, and spiritual. What traditional cultures which practice ritual initiation understand is that what matters most in the initiatory process is not whether the initiate survives physically, but that that person's consciousness is transformed--for her own enhancement and for that of the tribe.

What I want to reinforce for all of us is how imperative it is in the days ahead for us to walk consciously, cautiously, and compassionately through the fires of this long, protracted initiation. Beyond our physical, financial, and logistic preparations, we must continuously work--and it will be work--to open our hearts and minds to the larger purpose behind the ordeals. We must ask ourselves what each particular experience wants to reveal to us, how it comes to us to open our eyes and cleanse the doors of our perception. We will be incessantly reminded that civilization has come to all this, the depletion and exhaustion of the earth community and all of the suffering that attends that.

In a sense, I believe we are fortunate to be living

in this time and on this planet because something greater than our finite human egos is delivering a message with unmistakable clarity: Living estranged from the earth community as if we are the only and the most important species on earth does not work, and collapse wishes to make certain that we understand unequivocally and irrevocably that our only survival and our only serenity will be found in living as if we and the earth are one.

Moreover, because we and the earth community are one, it is imperative that we reach out to our neighbors and community members. Their awareness may range from totally clueless to that of fellow collapse watcher, but bonds must be made and trust built--for our well being and for theirs. In the days ahead, we will need them, and they will need us. The more familiar we are with each other, the less likely that any of us is scapegoated or victimized by panicked, hungry people who feel victimized and powerless to cope with what they perceive to have been dealt.

The time for a sense of entitlement is over. We are not entitled to anything. I repeat: We are not entitled to anything. Each day, each moment, each breath, each bite of food and drop of water, each smile or warm hand on our shoulder, if we are fortunate enough to have them, are precious gifts to be savored, treasured, and given thanks for.

I hold a vision of possibility--the potential for small pockets of survivors to create local outposts of conscious community in which they can live compassionately, practicing out of necessity and choice those behaviors that sustain themselves and the earth. Those who have already begun this process may have an advantage, but none of us will be immune--nor should we be, in my opinion. It appears that this momentous initiation is the only way in which humans can fully and finally comprehend the toxicity of civilization.

Many citizens of the former Soviet Union discovered through the experience of collapse what ultimately mattered most. Yes, there was violence, crime, paranoia, hunger, thirst, deprivation, and astounding loss, but unprecedented compassion, trust, bonding, cooperation, and support flourished in the midst of total societal disintegration. For me, collapse is the opportunity for an outpouring of the latter qualities that causes me to at least partially welcome the demise of all that has prevented us from living and sharing them. Perhaps finally, amid a frightening unraveling, we will grow up--becoming mature human beings who ultimately find it impossible to tolerate anything remotely resembling industrial civilization because we will at last have become adults.

**The time for  
a sense of  
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is over. We  
are not entitled  
to anything. I  
repeat: We are  
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anything.**

# TASTES OF



## the harbor omelet

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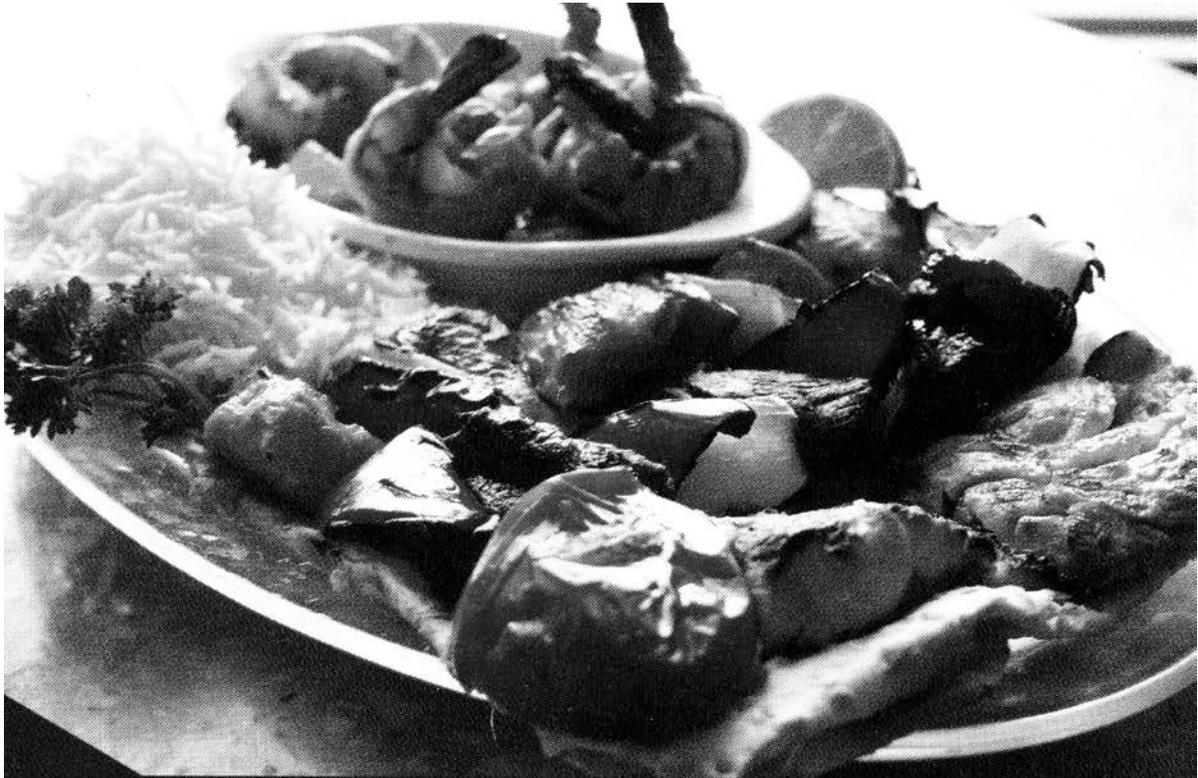
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Ask Barbra about her restaurant and you can hear how proud she is. It's not easy to gain a reputation as a diner serving familiar American fare. Nonetheless, her recipes have garnered the respect of Food Network's *Diners Drive-in's*

*and Dives*. Try the Harbor Omelet yourself and see why: shrimp, crab, scallops, spinach, green onion, swiss cheese, and a homemade spicy sauce. Then go home and take a nap before the massive-breakfast-food-coma kicks in.

# SAN PEDRO



## gypsy special combination

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sample all of the best they have to offer: ground beef, chicken, and filet skewers. The perfectly seasoned meat is grilled over an open fire. The basmati rice is light and fragrant, and when paired with a few shrimp, makes the perfect side.

# EMERGENCY BEHAVIOR

JAMES KUNSTLER

Every time I saw a car towing a motorboat this holiday weekend, I wondered what was going through the head of the towee. Did they have a sense that darkness was falling on their careers in motor sports? Did they have an inkling that an oil-and-gas crisis is upon us and just not give a shit? Or were they just going through the motions, following some implacable rote programming induced by, say, forty-odd years of TV addiction and a diet based on corn-syrup byproducts?

The holiday to me was a creepy hiatus from an ever more desperate reality overtaking the nation like a miasma. Meanwhile, the mainstream media's ongoing narrative has gotten stuck in the moronic groove of "drill drill drill." The belief of people like Larry Kudlow of CNBC and uber-mega-idiot John Stossel of ABC-News is that we could go back to \$1.50 gasoline if only congress would open the offshore exploration areas and the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. This view is just plain erroneous. Nothing we get out of these regions will come close to offsetting the ongoing depletion of worldwide oil resources, or even arresting our own losses.

Larry King had a particularly dreary debate Sunday night between Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. and a grab bag of "drill drill drill" advocates. Kennedy took the position that the US could achieve a sort of energy independence by massive deployments of wind and solar equipment. It's an understandable wish, I suppose, but not something I view as consistent with reality. The unfortunate part of the Larry King presentation is that it gives the public an idea that these two fantasies are the only possible responses to our predicament. No one is interested in changing our current behavior.

In the background of these energy conundrums is the sickening spectacle of the nation's fatal insolvency, which remains partially disguised by the machinations of the Federal Reserve, using the various new loan "windows" to maintain the illusion that the major banks have

not swindled themselves out of existence--and in doing so, caused at least \$3 trillion (so far) in capital to vanish in a black hole. This three-card-monte game has gone on for a whole year now, and the consequences are hitting home. No more money can be lent into existence.

One consequence is that other nations sitting on our exported dollars (from our massive trade deficit) have apparently decided to spend off those dollars rather than wait for the fullblown financial collapse of the nation issuing them. My guess is that they are spending those dollars on oil, the primary resource of industrial economies, and that they are prepared to outbid other contestants (including the USA) no matter what--because they know the dollar is losing value, and that those losses are apt to accelerate over time, and what else would they spend them on? I suspect this is behind the rising price of oil more than anything else--certainly more than the phantom "speculators" the right wing is yelling about--and that behind the spending off of those exported dollars are the geological facts of oil being a finite resource inequitably distributed around the world.

But to get back to my prior point, things are hitting home anyway, and with force. The US economy is crumbling because the way we conduct the activities of daily life is insane relative to our circumstances. We've spent sixty years ramping up a suburban living arrangement that has suddenly entered a state of failure, and all its accessories and furnishings are failing in concert. The far-flung McHouse tracts are becoming both useless and worthless in the face of gasoline prices that will never be cheap again. The strip malls and office "parks" are following the residential real estate off a cliff. The retail tenants of all those places are hemorrhaging customers

who have maxed out every last credit card. The lack of business is now leading to substantial layoffs. The airline industry is dying and will probably cease to exist in its familiar form in 24 months. The trucking industry is dying, threatening the entire just-in-time distribution system of things that even people with little money to spend still need, like food.

These conditions will now get a lot worse, no matter whether the banks continue to conceal their problems. All of it leads to an inflection point that coincides with the November election. By then, I expect that quite a few banks will be toast, job layoffs will rise spectacularly, foreclosures and bankruptcies will be raging across the land, and homeowners north of the magnolia belt will be

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our circumstances.**

shattered by the cost of staying warm this winter.

All this hardship and woe will be blamed on the Republican party. It may actually kill off the party. Political parties do go out of business in American history, and this one deserves to die--with its aggressive know-nothingism, its avaricious, punitive religious extremism (the religious part often being fake), its stunning inattention to financial malfeasance in areas under its direct supervision, and its gross incompetent mismanagement of the nation's strategic interests.

That said, I will feel a little sorry for Mr Obama if he gets to the White House. He'll have to find a gentle way to tell the truth to the people who elected him, people who will be suffering mightily, and who will be very sore about their losses. He'll have to tell them that the previous "release" of the American Dream software is obsolete, and the new version will require a whole lot more of them in the way of earnest effort, delayed gratification, and revised expectations.

There's a whole lot we can do to greet the new circumstances awaiting us, but the one thing we can't afford to do is put all our efforts into keeping the current system running as is. Reality simply won't permit it. We would squander our dwindling remaining resources trying to keep it all going. The next president is going to have to lead us through the awful process of cutting our losses. So far, the debate has been about how to avoid that.

James Kunstler is the author of *The Long Emergency* (Atlantic Monthly Press).

1	<b>2ND</b>	1
2	<b>STREET</b>	2
3	<b>OPTICAL</b>	3
4	<b>FEATURING:</b>	4
5	<b>SILHOUETTE</b>	5
6	<b>ALAN MIKLI</b>	6
7	<b>CHANEL</b>	7
8	<b>PRADA</b>	8
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# THE SHOWDOWN BETWEEN CONGRESS AND THE COG

PETER DALE SCOTT

In August 2007, Congressman Peter DeFazio, a member of the House Homeland Security Committee, told the House that he and the rest of his Committee had been barred from reviewing parts of National Security Presidential Directive 51, the White House supersecret plans to implement so-called "Continuity of Government" in the event of a mass terror attack or natural disaster.(1)

Norm Ornstein, of the conservative American Enterprise Institute, commented, "I cannot think of one good reason" for denial. Ornstein added, "I find it inexplicable and probably reflective of the usual, knee-jerk overextension of executive power that we see from this White House."(2) The story, ignored by the mainstream press, involved more than the usual tussle between the legislative and executive branches of the U.S. Government. What was at stake was a contest between Congress's constitutional powers of oversight, and a set of policy plans that could be used to suspend or modify the constitution.

There is nothing wrong with disaster planning per se. Like all governments, the U.S. government must develop plans for the worst contingencies. But Congress has a right to be concerned about Continuity of Government (COG) plans refined by Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld over the past quarter century, which journalists have described as involving suspension of the constitution. (3)

In the 1980s, a secret group of planners inside and outside the government were assigned, by an Executive

Order, to develop a response to a nuclear attack in which the U.S. government had been decapitated, forcing an alternative to the constitutional rules of succession. Two of these planners were Dick Cheney, then a Congressman, and Donald Rumsfeld, then a private citizen and CEO of the G.D. Searle drug company.

"One of the awkward questions we faced was whether to reconstitute Congress after a nuclear attack. It was decided that no, it would be easier to operate without them," said one of the COG planners in the 1980s, who spoke to James Mann (*The Rise of the Vulcans*, 141-42). James Bamford reported the same remark in his book *Pretext for War* (p. 74).

After the end of the Cold War, the urgency of coming up with plans faded. The COG nuclear planning project "has less than six months to live," reported Tim Weiner of the *New York Times*. (April 17, 1994). Mann and Bamford concluded, wrongly, that all the COG planning of the Reagan era had been abandoned.

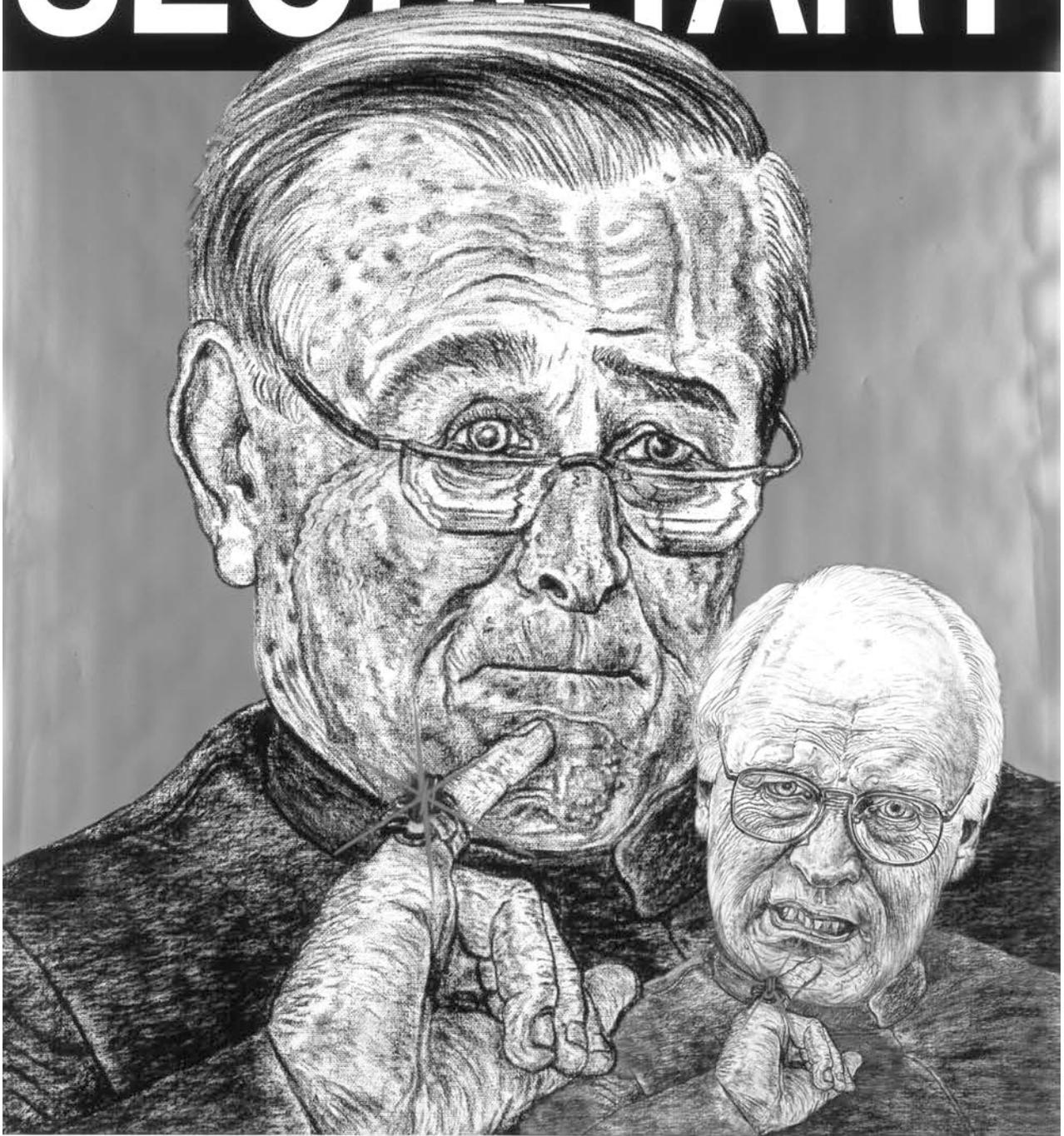
In fact, Reagan's Executive Order 12656, issued in 1988, remained in effect. The order states that Continuity of Government procedures are called for in the event of "any occurrence, including natural disaster, military attack, technological emergency, or other emergency, that seriously degrades or seriously threatens the national security of the United States."(4) Under Clinton, some parts of the planning, presumably military, were continued by a group including Rumsfeld and others whose roster (according to Andrew Cockburn) was "filled almost exclusively with Republican hawks." Cockburn quotes one participant, a former Pentagon official, who said "They'd meet, do the exercise, but also sit around and castigate the Clinton administration in the most extreme way."(5) According to the 9/11 Commission Report (p. 326; cf. p. 38), "Contingency plans for the continuity of government" were implemented on September 11, 2001.(6) But what measures were invoked remains unclear.

Some clues may be supplied by COG's past history.

COG planning in the 1980s was handled by the Federal Emergency Management Agency and its controversial director, Louis Giuffrida. According to a *Miami Herald* article by Alfonso Chardy on July 5, 1987, Giuffrida's plans included "suspension of the Constitution," along

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suspension  
of the  
constitution.**

# SECRETARY



# OF OFFENSE

PREEMPTIVE MORALIZING WARFARE (when the whole rest of the world is against it) IS GROOVY, BABY!

Artwork by Robbie Conal

NOTES

with detailed arrangements for the declaration of martial law.(7)

Those suspicious of what COG means today have pointed to a number of post 9/11 steps to facilitate the implementation of martial law, including the creation of a new military command (NORTHCOM) for the continental United States. They note also Homeland Security's strategic plan Endgame, whose stated goal is the creation of detention camps designed to "remove all removable aliens," including "potential terrorists."

Then in 2007 National Security Presidential Directive 51 (NSPD 51), issued by the White House, empowered the President to personally ensure "continuity of government" in the event of any "catastrophic emergency."(8) According to the *Washington Post* (May 10, 2007), this directive "formalizes a shift of authority," from the Department of Homeland Security to the White House, in establishing "a shadow government" after an emergency.(9) Congress has yet to hold a single hearing on NSPD 51.(10)

NSPD 51 contains "classified Continuity Annexes" which shall "be protected from unauthorized disclosure." Congressman DeFazio twice requested to see these Annexes, the second time in a letter cosigned by House Homeland Security Committee Chairman Bennie Thompson and Oversight Subcommittee Chairman Christopher Carney. It was these requests that the White House denied.

Without full disclosure, such suspicions will only fester and distract from the real issue: the role of Congress in constitutional government. In the event of national emergency, Congress must be at the heart of the defense of democratic government and American territory. It is reasonable for the citizenry to ask, "How do Continuity of Government plans preserve and protect the role of the popularly chosen branch of government?" The answer is, we simply don't know.

DeFazio's inability to get access to the NSPD Annexes is less than reassuring. If members of the Homeland Security Committee cannot enforce their right to read secret plans of the Executive Branch, then the systems of checks and balances established by the U.S. Constitution would seem to be failing.

To put it another way, if the White House is successful in frustrating DeFazio, then Continuity of Government planning has arguably already superseded the Constitution as a higher authority. Will Congress insist on its right to review COG planning? The answer to this question will depend on discussion in the blogosphere, the degree of pressure exerted by the electorate on their representatives, and the questions asked the men and women who would be president.

Peter Dale Scott, a former Canadian diplomat and English Professor at the University of California, Berkeley, is a poet, writer, and researcher. He is the author of the forthcoming book (reissued and much enlarged) *The War Conspiracy: JFK, 9/11, and the Deep Politics of War*, due in August 2008. It can be pre-ordered from the Mary Ferrell Foundation Press at [http://www.maryferrell.org/wiki/index.php/MFF\\_Store](http://www.maryferrell.org/wiki/index.php/MFF_Store). Scott's website is <http://www.peterdalescott.net>.

1. Congressional Record, August 2, 2007 (<http://fas.org/sgp/congress/2007/cog.html>). The text of National Security Presidential Directive 51 can be seen here (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/05/20070509-12.html>).

2. Jeff Kosseff, *The Oregonian* (<http://www.sherdog.net/forums/archive/index.php/t-609111.html>), July 20, 2007.

3. Scott, *The Road to 9/11*, 183-87; citing Ross Gelbspan, *Break-ins, Death Threats, and the FBI: The Covert War against the Central America Movement* (Boston: South End Press, 1991), 184; Alfonso Chardy, *Miami Herald*, July 5, 1987.

4. The provisions of Executive Order 12656 of November 18, 1988, appear at 53 FR 47491, 3 CFR, 1988 Comp., p. 585, Executive Order 12656, "Assignment of Emergency Preparedness Responsibilities," (<http://www.archives.gov/federal-register/codification/executive-order/12656.html>). Gellman and Schmidt later claimed, incorrectly, that Executive Order 12656 dealt only with "a nuclear attack." *The Washington Post*, "Shadow Government Is at Work in Secret," March 1, 2002.

5. Andrew Cockburn, *Rumsfeld: His Rise, Fall, and Catastrophic Legacy* (New York: Scribner, 2007), 88.

6. 9/11 Commission Report, 326, cf. 38; Scott, *Road to 9/11*, 220-29.

7. Alfonso Chardy, "Reagan Aides and the 'Secret' Government," *Miami Herald*, July 5, 1987.

8. National Security Presidential Directive 51. (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/05/20070509-12.html>).

9. Spencer S. Hsu, "Bush Changes Continuity Plan: Administration, Not DHS, Would Run Shadow Government" (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/05/09/AR2007050902719.html>), *Washington Post*, May 10, 2007.

10. Lewis Seiler and Dan Hamburg, *San Francisco Chronicle* (<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=c/a/2008/02/04/ED5OUPQJ7.DTL>), February 4, 2008.

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# WAR CONTRACTOR FRAUD SUITS

MATT RENNER

A backlog of whistleblower lawsuits against military contractors has been swelling and festering since the early days of the so-called war on terror. According to critics, the Department of Justice (DOJ) has blocked the progress of these lawsuits to spare the Bush administration a major political black eye should the truth about ongoing war profiteering be revealed, a charge the DOJ denies.

Under the False Claims Act, a civil war era law, when an employee of a company thinks they have evidence that their company is defrauding the US government, the individual can file a lawsuit on behalf of the government against the contractor by filing a special lawsuit called a qui tam – a Latin abbreviation for “he who sues in this matter for the king as for himself.”

The exact number of qui tam cases stuck in legal limbo is unknown because the cases are kept under strict seal. But sources who have been following the issue closely estimate that there are between 50 and 70 Iraq contracting fraud cases under seal. Under normal circumstances, when the DOJ receives a qui tam case, it conducts an investigation into the whistleblower’s claims. If there is sufficient evidence of significant fraud, the DOJ joins with the whistleblower to sue the company in question and recover the government’s money. The whistleblower can receive up to 30 percent of money recovered as a reward for their service to the taxpayer.

Not a single qui tam case against war contractors has been joined by the Bush administration DOJ despite the possibility of recovering billions of dollars for the US tax-

payer and reining in war profiteers, who continue to cheat and defraud the government and the US troops mired in battle.

“The money that’s gone into waste, fraud and abuse under these contracts is just so outrageous, it’s egregious,” Congressman Henry Waxman (D-California) told the BBC, adding, “It may well turn out to be the largest war profiteering in history.”

As chairman of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, Waxman and his team of investigators have been tracking mismanagement, waste and fraud in Iraq war contracting. His investigations have created a rough sketch of where US and Iraqi money has been stolen and wasted. The qui tam cases may provide the missing link: the voices of individual employees who can give first hand accounts of the profiteering.

According to qui tam investigator Dina Rasor, co-author of *Betraying Our Troops: The Destructive Result of Privatizing War*, the wave of qui tam cases is coming, but will probably have to wait until the next administration.

“The investigations by Waxman and the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction have left breadcrumbs leading everywhere. Either qui tams have not been filed, which is not the case, or they have not yet come out,” Rasor claims.

Rasor’s book documents numerous examples of fraud and negligence on the part of military contractors in the Iraq war theater. Rasor works



Photo by Amelia Mulkey

directly with Iraq contracting fraud whistleblowers, but is prevented from discussing any aspect of the cases she is involved with because they remain under seal.

Critics charge that the DOJ is misusing its power to keep the qui tam cases sealed in order to prevent a massive and unprecedented level of war profiteering from becoming public.

The DOJ strongly rejects this claim. “There are cases being investigated. I have never heard of anything being blocked for political reasons. The people who are the day in and day out attorneys in the civil division are career employees and they do their job,” Charles Miller, spokesman for the DOJ civil division claims, adding, “I expect that

the cases will move when the investigations are complete ...It has nothing to do with the administration.”

A unique factor in qui tam suits is that even if the cases are unsuccessful or companies settle the lawsuits to avoid trial, the facts of the case are eventually made public. Therefore, the historical record on the most privatized military operation in US history has only begun to be written.

These qui tam cases must eventually be dealt with because the statute of limitations--the amount of time whistleblowers have to file their case--does not run out once the case has been filed. Whistleblowers have up to six years (if acting without DOJ backing) to file a qui tam case. This means that cases involving Iraq reconstruction fraud will continue to pile up for years after the last contractors leave the country.

Whistleblowers and the lawyers who represent them in these qui tam cases are in a tough spot. On the one hand, they have a financial stake in the successful prosecution of the suit they file. In most cases, they need the US government to join with them to investigate the alleged fraud and to bring the case to court. Federal judges who hear these cases are unlikely to take the lawsuits seriously if the government--the party with the most money at stake--is not on board.

On the other hand, these lawyers and whistleblowers are the only people who know the severity and scope of the fraud cases they file. They are the only people outside the DOJ who can attest to the potential cover-up by the Bush administration.

This relationship between the whistleblower and the government has seemingly kept most lawyers involved with qui tam cases from speaking out against the DOJ blackout of Iraq contracting fraud suits for fear that doing so would endanger their cases.

However, an independently wealthy maverick lawyer from central Florida has taken the DOJ to task publicly. Alan Grayson, of Grayson and Kubli PC, a law group specializing in qui tam suits, has struck out on his own to pursue contractor fraud cases without the help of the DOJ. Along the way, he has also become an outspoken critic of the DOJ who, in his view, is perpetrating a massive cover-up at the behest of the Bush administration and their allies in the military contracting industry.

“The war has been going on now for five years. [The DOJ] is not litigating a single case of contractor fraud against any contractor in Iraq. They have swept the whole thing under the rug,” Grayson claims, adding, “They’re either stupid or they’re liars and I tend to think it is the latter.

We have an administration that is only good at managing news and nothing else.”

Under normal circumstances, the DOJ decides to join or reject a qui tam case within 60 days. The vast majority of the pending Iraq fraud cases have remained under seal, with the DOJ refusing to join or reject the cases. In keeping the cases in limbo, the DOJ keeps the allegations and evidence away from public scrutiny.

Don Warren, of the Warren Benson law group, specializes in qui tam cases. He has knowledge of ongoing Iraq reconstruction fraud cases, but could not give details or quantify the total amount of money at stake in his cases.

Warren does not believe there is an overt conspiracy at work to keep the DOJ from joining whistleblowers in Iraq fraud cases. Instead, he sees the lack of fraud cases as more of an issue of underfunding and understaffing at the DOJ civil division.

“The resources have been dried up under this administration. The white collar civil fraud prosecutors are way understaffed, underpaid, and overworked. This administration has sucked dry the resources for the civil fraud prosecutors in DOJ,” Warren said, adding, “The investigators

sometimes don’t have the budget to pay to make copies of documents, take depositions, travel to interview witnesses.”

“The administration is protecting its donor base--big pharmaceutical companies, big defense contractors--and they don’t care about the little guy, the taxpayer,” Warren said when asked why he thought the Bush administration would deliberately underfund white collar crime investigations.

“It doesn’t make sense. Thirteen dollars is returned to the US treasury for every dollar spent on these prosecutions. It is the only government program that pays for itself 13 times over,” he said.

“If I asked anyone in the department, they’d say they need more resources. Whether that is true or not I can’t say for sure,” DOJ spokesman Charles Miller said in response to questions about underfunding.

# ...individuals can file a lawsuit on behalf of the government against the contractor by filing a special lawsuit called a qui tam

**-Latin abbreviation for “he who sues in this matter for the king as for himself.”**

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# RISING HEALTH CARE COSTS CAUSING SERIOUS ECONOMIC WOES

J A S O N L E O P O L D

**S**kyrocketing health care costs are taking a toll on the nation's long-term economic well being, requiring an immediate "multipronged solution" before the "window of opportunity" to address the issue closes, according to a new report by the Government Accountability Office, the investigative arm of Congress.

The report, *Long Term Federal Fiscal Challenge Driven Primarily by Health Care*, was prepared by Gene Dodaro, the acting U.S. Comptroller General. He says the federal government is on an "unsustainable long-term fiscal path" driven primarily by rising health care costs.

"Rapidly rising health care costs are not simply a federal budget problem," the GAO report says. "Growth in health-related spending is the primary driver of the fiscal challenges facing state and local governments as well. Unsustainable growth in health care spending also threatens to erode the ability of employers to provide coverage to their workers and undercuts their ability to compete in a global marketplace."

"The large fiscal gap is primarily the result of spending on Medicare and Medicaid, which continue to consume ever-larger shares of both the federal budget and the economy," the report added. "Federal expenditures on Medicare and Medicaid represent a much larger, faster-growing, and more immediate problem than Social Security. Medicare and Medicaid are not unique in experiencing rapid

spending growth, but instead this growth largely mirrors spending trends in other public health care programs and the overall health care system. A number of factors contribute to the rise in spending, including the use of new medical technology and markets."

Complicating the long-term economic issue the country faces is the fact that for years the federal government has financed other federal initiatives with surpluses in Social Security trust funds placing a heavy burden on taxpayers.

"When such borrowings occur, the Department of the Treasury issues federal securities to these government funds that are backed by the full faith and credit of the U.S. Government," the GAO report says. "Although borrowing by one part of the federal government from another does not have the same economic and financial implications as borrowing from the public, it represents a claim on future resources and hence a burden on future taxpayers and the future economy. If federal securities held by those funds are included, the federal government's total debt is much higher: about \$9 trillion as of the end of fiscal year 2007." Last week, the Senate Finance Committee convened a hearing to hear testimony about the rising costs of health care and the burden it's placing on the economy.

Dodaro testified about the issue and said immediate health care reform is essential in order to alleviate the current fiscal woes. Providing taxpayers with affordable health care is the cornerstone of Sen. Barack Obama's presidential campaign. Peter Orszag, director of the Congressional Budget Office, who also testified before the Finance Committee, said, "health care spending is the single most important factor determining the nation's long-term fiscal condition."

"Our political system arguably is not particularly effective at addressing gradual long-term problems

such as rising health care costs and aging," Orszag told the Finance Committee. "But the problems caused by rising Health care costs are not just long-term ones. In fact, some of them are already having significant effects on various aspects of our society. Health care costs are already reducing workers' take-home pay to a degree that

**"Unsustainable growth in health care spending also threatens to erode the ability of employers to provide coverage to their workers and undercuts their ability to compete in a global marketplace."**

**-GAO Report**

is both underappreciated and at least partially unnecessary, consuming roughly a quarter of the federal budget, and putting substantial pressure on state budgets (mostly through the Medicaid program), thereby constraining funding for other governmental priorities.”

Orszag said the federal government has dealt with the economic crisis by continuing to borrow heavily from other countries, which he said might not be sustainable. He said the Bush administration officials and lawmakers have ignored the country’s dire financial condition for far too long, comparing the situation with an individual who remains in a dysfunctional relationship. Sen. Max Baucus (D-Montana), the chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, said that since 1975 healthcare spending per capita has outpaced overall economic growth at a rate of 2.4 percent faster in Medicare, 2.2 percent faster in Medicaid, and 2 percent faster in other health related areas.

“Unless we act, in 2030, the federal budget deficit will grow to more than 10 percent of the economy,” Baucus said during the hearing last week. “In 2050, it will be more than 22 percent of the economy. And by 2082, it will exceed 54 percent of the economy. These deficits would dwarf the post-World-War-II record of 6.3 percent in 1983. If we control healthcare costs, then along with prudent policies for the rest of the budget, we will be able to control federal budget deficits. But if we fail to control healthcare costs, it won’t matter what else we do in the rest of the budget. We will have no hope of keeping federal budget deficits under control.”

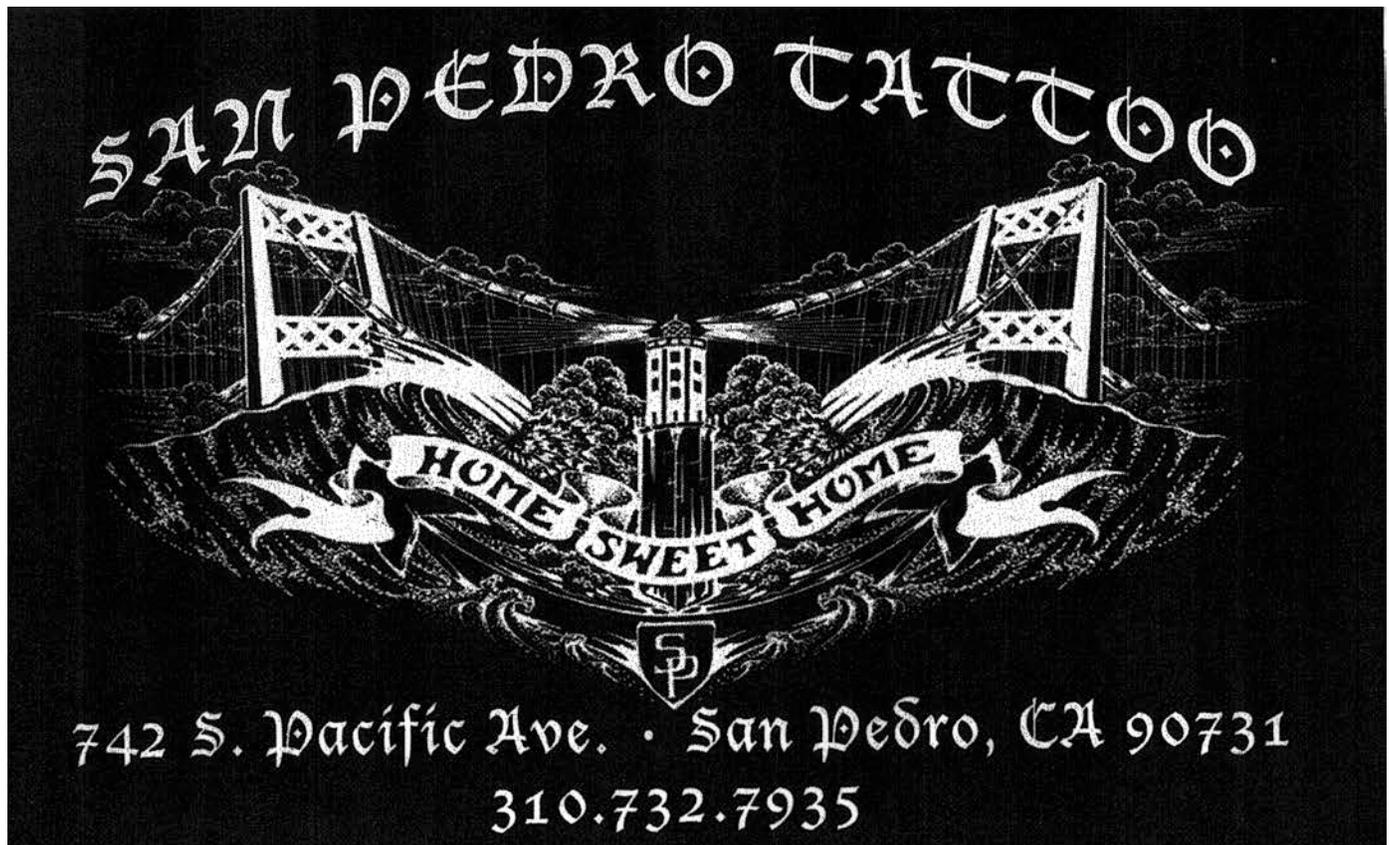
The GAO report confirmed Baucus's economic predictions. “Health care costs are growing much faster than the economy, and the nation’s population is aging.”

The GAO report says. “These drivers will soon place unprecedented, growing, and long-lasting stress on the federal budget. Absent action, debt held by the public will grow to unsustainable levels.” Baucus is trying to pass legislation that will prevent physicians from taking a 10.6 percent Medicare cut, which is expected to take effect in July. Lobbyists representing doctors warned that if the legislation goes through doctors would no longer see Medicare patients.

The GAO report emphasized, “Growth in health-related spending--Medicaid and health insurance for state and local employees and retirees--is the primary driver of the long-term fiscal challenges facing the state and local governments.”

“If unchanged, the federal government’s increased spending and rising deficits will drive a rising debt burden,” the report says. “At the end of fiscal year 2007, federal debt held by the public exceeded \$5 trillion. This growth in the federal government’s debt cannot continue unabated without causing serious harm to the economy. In the last 200 years, only during and after World War II has debt held by the public exceeded 50 percent of [gross domestic product].”

The GAO has recommended tax increases and spending cuts to deal with the issue. But in an election season it’s unlikely either presidential candidate will embrace the idea. Moreover, Sen. John McCain, the presumptive Republican presidential candidate, said he would not only make George W. Bush’s tax cuts permanent if he were elected but would also look at other ways he can lower taxes. Still, the GAO report says, “policymakers could phase in the policy changes so that the tax increases



or spending cuts would grow over time and allow people to adjust.”

“Delaying action would make future adjustments even larger. Under our alternative simulation, waiting even 10 years would require a revenue increase of about 45 percent, or non-interest spending cuts of about 40 percent. This gap is too large to grow out of the problem. To be sure, additional economic growth would certainly help the federal government’s financial condition, but it will not eliminate the need for action,” the report says.

Baucus agrees that the issue requires immediate attention. However, it’s unlikely that lawmakers will take action to address the matter until after a new administration

takes office in 2009. But by then the issue will no doubt worsen, the GAO report says.

“The longer action on reforming health care and Social Security is delayed, the more painful and difficult the choices will become. Simply put, the federal budget is on an unsustainable long-term fiscal path that is getting worse with the passage of time. The window for timely action is shrinking.”

Jason Leopold is editor of *The Public Record*.

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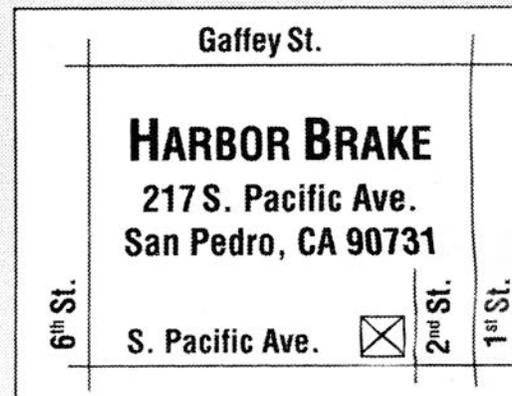
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# HEALTH CARE AND REAL REFORM

ROSE ANN DEMORO

**T**he recent splash of news and internet coverage for the new Health Care for America Now coalition of labor, progressive and liberal groups is a reminder of the critical importance of health care reform. And a reminder that partial solutions, such as those proposed by the coalition, will only perpetuate, not end the health care crisis.

The groups behind the new coalition are working in concert with the Obama campaign and Democratic leaders in Congress to build “consensus” around a plan that would presumably be introduced in the first days of the next administration, and pushed through to a quick vote before opponents can mount a “Harry and Louise”-style counter attack. But, in search of a supposedly politically viable plan, the advocates of this approach have surrendered in advance on the only overhaul that will actually cure the disease, a single-payer, expanded and improved Medicare for all reform.

Their good intentions will leave the same failed system in place, and will not even blunt the political opposition from those on the right and corporate interests who will continue to challenge anything that looks like even modest reform. They create a false hope of systemic change that won't be, squandering the opportunity to achieve the fundamental reform so desperately needed with so many lives in the balance.

They've also missed one of the most important lessons of the failure of the Clinton plan of 1993-94 which collapsed in part due to the absence of a broad, grassroots, activist movement needed to counter the insurance industry. Only single payer engenders such a movement, the very reason the single payer bill now in Congress, HR 676, has more co-sponsors than any other reform bill with tens of thousands around the country already working to enact it. Health Care for America Now has identified the main culprit and obstacle to genuine reform. As their inaugural ad proclaims, “Will health insurance companies ever put your health ahead of their profits? We can't trust insurance

companies to fix the healthcare mess.”

There's just one problem. The coalition's proposal does nothing to end the actual practice of insurance companies putting their profits ahead of your health. Nor does it fix the two central components of the health care morass--insurance company denials of care and the financial squeeze facing American families due to ever skyrocketing healthcare costs which is exacerbated by the escalating credit crisis.

Consider the four healthcare questions posed by families in the first 30-second ad: “Will they pay for his inhaler? Is my surgery covered? Can I choose my child's doctor? Will they cover the chemo?” All are the direct result of care denials and price gouging by the insurers--and none would be solved by the HCFAN “statement of common purpose.”

**Health Care for America NOW has identified the main culprit and obstacle to genuine reform. As their inaugural ad proclaims,**

**“Will health insurance companies ever put your health ahead of their profits?”**

How does the HCFAN coalition propose to crack down on the insurance pirates? With a “watchdog role” on the plans “to assure that risk is fairly spread” and that “insurers do not turn people away, raise rates or drop coverage based on a person's health history or wrongly delay or deny care.”

You can watch someone rob your bank, but unless you stop them, the vaults are still going to be stripped bare. If you're looking for the hammer or any enforcement mechanism in the HCFAN proposal, don't bother, it's not there. The insurers don't care if we know they are thieves, they will continue to deny and delay care because it's in their DNA. It's how they are set up to operate, it's how they make money for their shareholders, it's how they generate plush pay packages for their executives, and it's how they compete with the other insurance giants.

Nor does the HCFAN proposal contain any effective cost controls on the insurers. Their commitment to basing pricing on “ability to pay” is a recipe for merely getting the healthcare you can afford, not what you need. It also fails to assure real choice of providers beyond the limited network established by all private insurance plans. The bone the coalition sponsors throw to single payer advocates is the false promise of a public

plan side by side with private insurance. The public plan, they contend, will be so much more attractive that the private plans will just wither away. Don't count on it.

The insurance companies will always be able to lower their prices with cut rate plans with lower standards that they can aggressively market through massive advertising, tele-marketing, even door to door salesmen (as some do now) with a marketing campaign that the public plans will not have the funding to be able to match. The private plans can then continue to cherry pick the younger and healthier patients while the sicker and older patients are dumped in the public plan, wrecking the whole idea of a risk pool and driving up the costs for the public plan to operate. The competition won't starve the private plans and cause them to wither away, they'll starve the public plan.

There's only one way to stop the insurance industry abuses--it's to actually stop them. The rest of the world has figured this one out--see the study in Britain earlier this year that found that the U.S. ranks last in preventable deaths among 19 industrialized nations even though we spend twice as much on healthcare as anyone else. Isn't it time we figured it out here as well?

Rose Ann DeMoro is executive director of the California Nurses Association/National Nurses Organizing Committee.

## THE SOFT PARADE

of strangers straggle by from everywhere  
to meet the supernal sight of a greekish  
deity frescoed on the side of a beach hotel

it breaks on through our genial gazes to  
the other side of nowhere, following our  
moves from above, speaking to only us  
about what gets us on, lights our fire

no swelling signs of the epicures for the  
sucking society, the sybaritic delights  
that pushed this musical child of Rimbaud  
and Foucault per verse, the satyr-assayer  
of the electric folk-song, to the eeeeeend

just bronzed sinews and locks, a lean and  
pathic pose breaking frame, microphone in  
hand, inviting us to gorge the Hollywood  
Hellenic cockrockcorpse we made him like  
necrophiliacs at the exhumation of Nero

JOHN O'KANE

## FOR THE FLOR Y CANTO LATINO FESTIVAL

I remember the boxcars  
not of a roll of dice, but  
of that train from Mexico  
smuggling across the border.

Remember its ceiling, O  
hieroglyphs of last-gasp  
screams of fingernails,  
tears of blood,

and the flood of deaths that  
came without water. 18  
suffocated that day; how many  
more have never been reported?

I read these lines now at Flor  
y Canto, and indeed let's all  
read and sing the living word  
that's Latino and Chicano

hope wrapped in tortillas of rage,  
and turn the sounds of battered-  
down doors, of brutal round-ups  
in the night, of the iron fingers

jabbed down into shoulders of  
bending, grape-picking workers,  
into flaming poems of resistance  
and real change, a revolutionary

change that's all the way up from  
the grassroots to the branching tree  
of stars in a sky that finally will  
belong to us all.

JACK HIRSCHMAN

# SAN PEDRO PROGRESS: INTERVIEW WITH JANICE HAHN

JOHN O'KANE

**P**lanners are poised to model San Pedro's future in the downtown harbor area. Most everyone these days is for a more prosperous town, but we don't all agree about what must be done to achieve it. Ever since the last real estate spike in the late 90s there's been an influx of development money into communities that need and welcome improvement, especially along the coast. And San Pedro has indeed benefited. Clusters of condos have been ready for occupancy in the downtown area for some time, and would likely be filled by now if the real estate market hadn't slowed. In fact without this change San Pedro might already be a thriving seaside mecca like Santa Monica or Venice...

Yet this is not likely since it's a harbor town. The port's very existence and the sights and sounds associated with it will repel the tribes of sun-worshipping body sculptures that parade the popular beaches. And Cabrillo beach hardly compares to those above and below us anyway. But the upside of diminished popularity has been lower prices relative to those areas, which has helped preserve a stable community of long-term residents who remain here over generations. The underside of deed flipping is transience. San Pedro is full of folks who grew up here and never left, and others who moved away for a while to pursue their cosmopolitan desires, returning to firm up the family tree and reclaim the deed.

It's fair to say that this solid base of residents wants to keep the town mostly the same. Which raises the issue of how to develop San Pedro in a way that salvages its special identity, and without catering to those who want to make it over into a place just like everywhere else.

One of the key elements of this identity is the

artists, many of whom occupy studios in the downtown harbor area. Though for outsiders it's usually longshoremen they think of when it comes to the town's larger visible image, San Pedro has a significant culture of artists. They must be part of any improvement package. Many of them have benefited from rents over the years that are lower than those in other coastal areas where the arts flourish. But experience has shown that costlier conditions soon follow successful development, making survival of even the fittest artists difficult.

Many artists and mom-and-pop retailers are actually feeling the heat already from the nation's "stagflation:" rising prices along with recessed economic activity. Jerry Gusha, owner of Williams' Books on 6th, says business has been way down the last couple of months. A sentiment echoed by many others. Some are leaving. D & D Gallery near 7th and Centre closed its doors last month because art is simply not selling these days. Others hang in there, fixed on the long-term bennies that will surely arrive once the process has had a chance to work. As far as the working artists are concerned, the downturn in sales is especially problematic since rents keep going up.

What's really at stake here is how to marry art and commerce, creativity and the market. There's great potential in San Pedro to form a relationship relatively immune to divorce.

**...as we grow  
in San Pedro  
a number of us have  
been concerned that we  
might lose our local  
artists and cultural  
institutions.**

Planners are quite aware of the fact that art is a product, but also a different kind of one in the sense that there's a lag between achievement and recognition for the emerging artist. So like new businesses that need start-up capital to compete, emerging artists need subsidies, start-up networks of all kinds that correct the market in advance while perceptions about the value of their product have a chance to adjust to a fairer version of reality than what crude supply-and-demand curves offer.

It's just good business. A bailout from the bottom up? Emerging artists are important to the vitality of community life. Without them our local market will be flooded with

imports, and this might work against efforts to forge a special arts-community identity. The advantages will surely filter up and around town, and perhaps sectarians of all stripes will lose their hard polemical edges and experience the sweetness and light that's after all supposed to be art's bottom line. Property owners might ease up on rents, and artists forced in anger to ponder Herbert Spencer's monosyllables might get the graces to match wits with them.

ACE (Arts, Culture and Entertainment district) is the organization empowered to bring this off. It's com-



Photo by John O'Kane

posed of artists, business people and professional planners on a mission so lofty that it may take an injection of Scandinavian Socialism to succeed. Facing the loss of artists and galleries due to rising rents, their goal is to build on the base of San Pedro's existing art scene to "make the area more business and permit-friendly to working artists, performing arts venues, art galleries, restaurants and merchants." They even propose to explore "affordable artist housing options."

In the interest of beginning a dialogue about these matters with Janice Hahn, LA's 15th District Councilwoman, we asked her the following question: It seems that we are perhaps victims of bad timing. At a moment when so much positive effort has been made in developing the downtown harbor area, we have one of the worst recessions in years. Are you optimistic?

**Janice Hahn:** Renaissance in Downtown San Pedro has been a longtime dream for many of us. Today, it is finally a reality. Not only do we have hundreds of new housing units right in downtown, we also have a number of brand new businesses. It is very exciting.

An important part of what gives downtown its charm is our artist community. The galleries are a wonderful part of the community and we all look forward to our monthly "First Thursday" events when the restaurants and galleries are open for business.

We all know people who live downtown will be more likely to spend their money downtown. We know

they will shop in our stores, eat in our restaurants, enjoy our entertainment and buy art from our local artists. This is one of many reasons why I believe that economic growth in downtown will help build a healthy artist community.

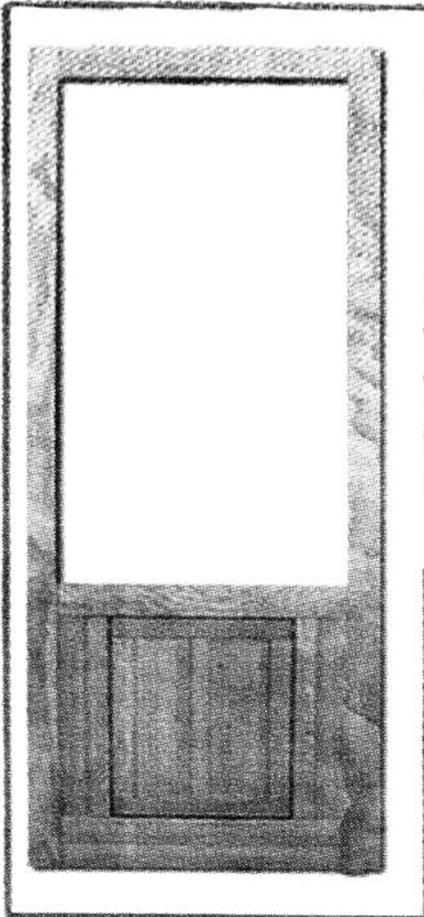
However, as we grow in San Pedro a number of us have been concerned that we might lose our local artists and cultural institutions. It has always been my goal to preserve these great treasures as we revitalize downtown San Pedro.

When the Urban Land Institute visited San Pedro 5 years ago, they found that "San Pedro is blessed with a vibrant arts community and San Pedro's galleries are leading the way to creating a unique retail destination." This is something we are constantly keeping in mind as we move forward with our redevelopment.

The adoption of our ACE District will allow us to plan for redevelopment in a way that takes our artist community into account. It allows us to create a plan to continue to revitalize downtown San Pedro but to also protect, preserve and nurture the vary art institutions that make us unique. I worked hard with the Los Angeles Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) to make sure ACE received \$100,000 per year for the next 5 years.

I recently heard about a senior artist colony in Burbank, called Meta Housing. They have a beautiful facility there and provide a variety of art opportunities such as music, theatre, sculpture, painting and the homes are reserved for senior artists. I think this is a great idea and I am working to do something similar in San Pedro.

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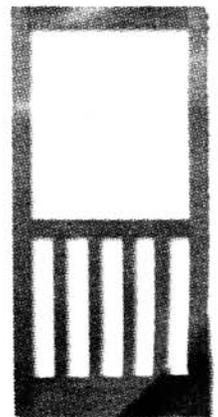
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# THE HEDONISTS OF POWER

CHRIS HEDGES

Washington has become Versailles. We are ruled, entertained and informed by courtiers. The popular media are courtiers. The Democrats, like the Republicans, are courtiers. Our pundits and experts are courtiers. We are captivated by the hollow stagecraft of political theater as we are ruthlessly stripped of power. It is smoke and mirrors, tricks and con games. We are being had.

The past week was a good one if you were a courtier. We were instructed by the high priests on television over the past few days to mourn a Sunday morning talk show host, who made \$5 million a year and who gave a platform to the powerful and the famous so they could spin, equivocate and lie to the nation. We were repeatedly told by these television courtiers, people like Tom Brokaw and Wolf Blitzer, that this talk show host was one of our nation's greatest journalists, as if sitting in a studio, putting on makeup and chatting with Dick Cheney or George W. Bush have much to do with journalism.

No journalist makes \$5 million a year. No journalist has a comfortable, cozy relationship with the powerful. No journalist believes that acting as a conduit, or a stenographer, for the powerful is a primary part of his or her calling. Those in power fear and dislike real journalists. Ask Seymour Hersh and Amy Goodman how often Bush or Cheney has invited them to dinner at the White House or offered them an interview.

All governments lie, as I.F. Stone pointed out, and it is the job of the journalist to do the hard, tedious reporting to shine a light on these lies. It is the job of courtiers, those on television playing the role of journalists, to feed off the scraps tossed to them by the powerful and never question the system. In the slang of the profession, these television courtiers are

"throats." These courtiers, including the late Tim Russert, never gave a voice to credible critics in the buildup to the war against Iraq. They were too busy playing their roles as red-blooded American patriots. They never fought back in their public forums against the steady erosion of our civil liberties and the trashing of our Constitution. These courtiers blindly accept the administration's current propaganda to justify an attack on Iran. They parrot this propaganda. They dare not defy the corporate state. The corporations that employ them make them famous and rich. It is their Faustian pact. No class of courtiers, from the eunuchs behind the Manchus in the 19th century to the Baghdad caliphs of the Abbasid caliphate, has ever transformed itself into a responsible elite. Courtiers are hedonists of power.

Our Versailles was busy this past week. The Democrats passed the FISA bill, which provides immunity for the telecoms that cooperated with the National Security Agency's illegal surveillance over the past six years. This bill means we will never know the extent of the Bush White House's violation of our civil liberties. Barack Obama signed it in the name of national security. The bill gives the U.S. government a license to eavesdrop on our phone calls and e-mails. It demolishes our right to privacy. It endangers the work of journalists, human rights workers, crusading lawyers and whistle-blowers who attempt to expose abuses the government seeks to hide. These private communications can be stored indefinitely and disseminated, not just to the U.S. government but to other governments as well. The bill will make it possible for those in power to identify and silence anyone who dares to make public information that defies the official narrative.

Being a courtier, and Obama is one of the best, requires agility and eloquence. The most talented of them can be lauded as persuasive actors. They entertain us. They make us feel good. They convince us they are our friends. We would like to have dinner with them. They are the smiley faces of a corporate state that has hijacked the government and is raping the nation. When the corporations make

their iron demands, these courtiers drop to their knees, whether to placate the telecommunications companies that fund their campaigns and want to be protected from lawsuits, or to permit oil and gas companies to rake in obscene profits and keep in place the vast subsidies of corporate welfare doled out by the state.

We cannot differentiate between illusion and reality. We trust courtiers wearing face powder who deceive us in the name of journalism. We trust courtiers in our political parties who promise to fight for our interests and then pass bill after bill to further corporate fraud and abuse. We confuse how we feel about courtiers like Obama and Russert with real information, facts and knowledge. We chant in unison with Obama that we want change, we yell "yes we can," and then stand dumbly by as he coldly votes away our civil liberties. The Democratic Party, including Obama, continues to fund the war. It refuses to impeach Bush and Cheney. It allows the government to spy on us without warrants or cause. And then it tells us it is our salvation. This is a form of collective domestic abuse. And, as so often happens in the weird pathology of victim and victimizer, we keep coming back for more.



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Amanda Clay  
Hair and Makeup

# DON'T DRINK THE NUCLEAR KOOL-AID

AMY GOODMAN

While the presidential candidates trade barbs and accuse each other of flip-flopping, they agree with President Bush on their enthusiastic support for nuclear power. Sen. John McCain has called for 100 new nuclear power plants. Sen. Barack Obama, in a July 2007 Democratic candidate debate, answered a pro-nuclear power audience member, "I actually think that we should explore nuclear power as part of the energy mix." Among Obama's top contributors are executives of Exelon Corporation, a leading nuclear power operator in the nation.

Just this week, Exelon released a new plan, called "Exelon 2020: A Low-Carbon Roadmap." The nuclear power industry sees global warming as a golden opportunity to sell its insanely expensive and dangerous power plants. But nuclear power is not a solution to climate change--rather, it causes problems. Amory Lovins is the co-founder and chief scientist of Rocky Mountain Institute in Colorado. He makes simple, powerful points against nuclear: "The nuclear revival that we often hear about is not actually happening. It is a very carefully fabricated illusion ... there are no buyers. Wall Street is not putting a penny of private capital into the industry, despite 100-plus percent subsidies." He adds: "Basically, we can have as many nuclear plants as Congress can force the taxpayers to pay for. But you won't get any in a market economy."

Even if nuclear power were economically viable, Lovins continues, "the first issue to come up for me would be the spread of nuclear weapons, which it greatly facilitates. If you look at places like Iran and North Korea...how do you think they're doing it? Iran claims to be making electricity vital to its development...The technology, materials, equipment,

skills are applicable to both...The president is absolutely right in identifying the spread of nuclear weapons as the gravest threat to our security, so it's really puzzling to me that he's trying to accelerate that spread every way he can think of...It's just an awful idea unless you're really interested in making bombs. He's really triggered a new Mideast arms race by trying to push nuclear power within the region."

Along with proliferation, there are terrorist threats to existing nuclear reactors, like Entergy's controversial Indian Point nuclear plant just 24 miles north of New York City. Lovins calls these "about as fat a terrorist target as you can imagine. It is not necessary to fly a plane into a nuclear plant or storm a plant and take over a control room in order to cause that material to be largely released. You can often do it from outside the site boundary with things the terrorists would have readily available."

Then there is the waste: "It stays dangerous for a very long time. So you have to put it someplace that stays away from people and life and water for a very long time...millions of years, most likely...So far, all the places we've looked turned out to be geologically unsuitable, including Yucca Mountain." Testifying at a congressional hearing this week, Energy Department official Edward Sproat said the price of a nuclear dump in Nevada's Yucca Mountain has climbed to \$90 billion. Slated to go online a decade ago, its opening is now projected for the year 2020. And even that's optimistic. Rep. Jim Matheson, D-Utah, wants to block nuclear waste from passing through Utah entirely, and most Nevadans oppose the Yucca waste plan.

The presidential candidates are wrong on nuclear power. Wind, solar and microgeneration (generating electricity and heat at the same time, in smaller plants), on the other hand, are taking off globally, gaining billions of dollars in private investments. Lovins summarizes: "One of the big reasons we have an oil problem and a climate problem today is we spent our money on the wrong stuff. If we had spent it on efficiency and renewables, those

problems would've gone away, and we would've made trillions of dollars' profit on the deal because it's so much cheaper to save energy than to supply it."

The answer is blowing in the wind.

Amy Goodman is host of "Democracy Now!"

# TIGER, TIGER, BURNING BLIGHT

DAVE ZIRIN

Tiger Woods is perhaps the most famous, and most dominant, athlete in the world today. The 32-year-old golfer with the multicultural background he once proudly described as "Cablinasian," has somehow accomplished the impossible: made golf on a Sunday must-see TV. Woods is a trailblazer and already a legend for his ability to perform when the spotlight is at its hottest. But he has also established a reputation for reticence when confronted with the real world off the greens.

For all his cultural capital, Woods has refused to take stands on issues that should hit close to home, such as restricted golf courses, or even when the Golf Channel's Kelly Tilghman suggested young PGA players "lynch him in a back alley" in a "joke" about how they might overcome his dominance. Tiger has largely maintained the tight-lipped silence of a Benedictine monk. After the lynching comment, ESPN's Scoop Jackson became so frustrated with this disciplined quietude he wrote, "Because of who he is, Tiger Woods has the power to make people listen. Not just hear his words--but embrace what he has to say...It's a stand he needs to take because people who change the world eventually have to take stands. Whether strong or silent, good or evil,

they take stands not to prove their beliefs, but to rectify a situation or condition.”

His defenders have always said that behind the scenes Woods has been an agent for change, and that he shouldn't be criticized just because he does his good deeds without media fanfare. They say he wields that influence through his nonprofit Tiger Woods Foundation. Go to the website, and a virtual Woods walks right onto your screen and welcomes you to a place where “kids can achieve anything.” The site boasts: “more than 10 million young people have benefited from the Tiger Woods Foundation since its inception in 1996. What started out with limited access throughout America, now reaches out to young people around the world.”

Yet now the Foundation is “reaching around the world” in a way that has human rights activists concerned about a business partnership that smells like sulfur. The Tiger Woods Foundation has entered into an extensive five-year partnership with Chevron Corporation, with the oil and energy giant becoming the title sponsor of the Tiger Woods Foundation World Challenge Golf Tournament. “Chevron has a track record and a commitment to bettering the communities where they operate,” Woods said in a press release on April 3. And Chevron's executive vice president chimed in, “Chevron, Tiger and the Tiger Woods Foundation share similar values...as well as a deep commitment to make a difference in local communities.”

They have certainly “made a difference in local communities,” but it's nothing they should be bragging about, and certainly nothing with which Woods should want his name attached. Chevron is in full partnership with the Burmese military regime on the Yadana gas pipeline project, the single greatest source of revenue for the military, estimated at nearly \$1 billion in 2007, nearly half of all the country's revenue. These are the same people who blocked international aid workers from assisting the victims of Cyclone Nargis. The death toll has been estimated at 78,000, but this number explodes as disease spreads

because help hasn't been allowed through the military lines. Even the US State Department has called the actions of the government “appalling.” Ka Hsaw Wa, co-founder and executive director of Earth Rights International, wrote in an open letter to Woods, “I myself have spoken to victims of forced labor, rape, and torture on Chevron's pipeline--if you heard what they said to me, you too would understand how their tragic stories stand in stark contrast to Chevron's rhetoric about helping communities.”

ERI's request to meet with Woods or someone from the Foundation has been met with silence, but while the Burmese junta's crimes are localized in Southeast Asia, Chevron is global. Lawsuits have been issued against Chevron's toxic waste dumping in Alaska, Canada, Angola, and California. Then there's the matter of 18 billion gallons of toxic waste the company has been accused of dumping in the Amazon. In a US District Court in San Francisco, the case of *Bowoto v. Chevron*, Nigerian plaintiffs have accused Chevron of actually arming and outfitting Nigerian oil security forces to shoot and kill protesters. Judge Susan Illston has refused to dismiss the case because, as Democracy Now! recently reported, “evidence show[s] direct links to Chevron officials.”

When pressed for comment, Tiger Woods Foundation President Greg McLaughlin issued this statement to me: “The Foundation's vision is to help young people reach their full potential. All our partners share in this vision, allowing us to make a positive impact in millions of young lives.” That response, to very serious and very direct charges, is the golf equivalent of a triple bogey. President McLaughlin should think more seriously about what Chevron is and what they do: they pollute, they destroy, they conspire with dictators, and heaven help anyone who gets in their way. Now they want to burnish their “brand” by partnering with Tiger Woods. Tiger's late father Earl once said of his son, “He will transcend this game...and bring to the world...a humanitarianism...which has never been known before. The world will

be a better place to live in...by virtue of his existence...and his presence.”

The partnership with Chevron makes a mockery of Earl Wood's hopes. To use an analogy from a different sport, the ball is now in Tiger's court. Will he allow himself to be tamed by corporate interests, or will he roar?

Dave Zirin's most recent book is *What's My Name, Fool?*

## LANGUAGE GAMES: THE LEGACY OF GEORGE CARLIN

PETER LAVENIA

George Carlin, one of the most important social critics of the last half-century, is dead. Carlin, like he was for millions, was a formative influence on my youth, and via the collective youths of multiple generations, the national consciousness. He will forever be remembered for being part of the wave of comedians that turned simple humor into biting social commentary--the children of Lenny Bruce.

It strikes me that, in many ways, Carlin had turned himself into a modern Socrates, always questioning our words, thoughts, and actions, and finding himself disappointed in the lack of reflection in the rest of us. Carlin acknowledged this in perhaps his most important routine:

“I love words. I thank you for hearing my words. I want to tell you something about words that I, uh, I think is important. I love words, as I say, they're my work, they're my

play, they're my passion. Words are all we have really."

The Seven Words routine was a milestone not just because Carlin managed to highlight the dilemma at the core of the modern condition, but also because it gave us a landmark Supreme Court case on freedom of speech that highlights how dangerous words can be to the guardians of mainstream mores, *FCC vs. Pacifica Foundation*. Carlin's monologue, played on Pacifica Radio in NYC, engendered a dispute as to what constituted decent speech on broadcast media--and the Court decided that the population needed to be protected from hearing those "deadly" words spoken by Carlin, who had done so in an effort to help us enlighten ourselves about the power of speech.

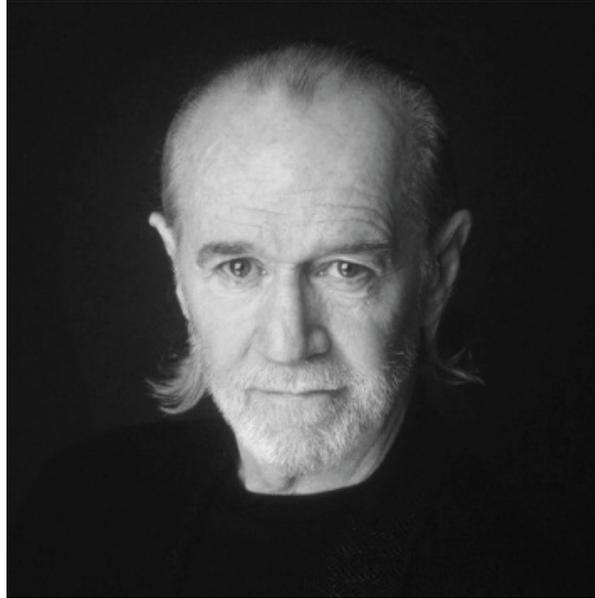
Justice William Brennan, writing in a stinging dissent from the majority on that decision, stated that: "because the radio is undeniably a public medium, these actions are more properly viewed as a decision to take part, if only as a listener, in an ongoing public discourse."

Censorship of language is an attempt to silence this public discourse, to stifle thoughts, actions, and ideas. George Carlin understood this perfectly well. Carlin was concerned with pointing out how we, as a society, have started using euphemistic language as a way to avoid dealing with tough concepts. This is a corollary--and perhaps more dangerous than the official censorship--to the FCC's abrogation of speech on TV and radio: self-censorship. In one of his books he noted:

"I mentioned several reasons why we seem to employ so much of it [euphemistic language]: the need to avoid unpleasant realities; the need to make things sound more important than they are...but no matter what the purpose, the one thing euphemisms all have in common is that they soften the language. They portray reality as less vivid. And I've noticed Americans have a problem with reality; they prefer to avoid the truth and not look

it in the eye. I think it's one of the consequences of being fat and prosperous and too comfortable."

Of course, the easy political examples are those we've been familiar with for some time now: George W. Bush's "enemy combatants," the "homicide" bombers, collateral damage. Carlin was adept at pointing these out along with the more common expressions we use between friends and colleagues. Religious, political, and



cultural hypocrites were not spared his withering gaze--I once noted how a portion of his audience left during one of his anti-religious diatribes at a concert of his that I attended.

So what, then, is Carlin's legacy? At the end of another of his famous routines he said that "the planet is fine, the people are fucked." He was amused with our capacity to, essentially, kill ourselves off as a species. He said that: "...it amuses me. Because it means the system is beginning to collapse, beginning to break down. I enjoy chaos and disorder. Not just because they help me professionally; they're also my hobby. I'm an entropy buff."

We are inundated with food yet prices are rising and people starve; we are awash in oil and prices have never been higher; we are aware of the effects of human-caused global warming and most of us choose to do nothing except complain about the

weather; our government openly lies and violates Constitutional rights and all we do is shrug. Carlin's choice was not to simply laugh at the downward spiral we were all on (by our choice); that is too superficial a reading of his humor. He was deeply concerned by the stupidity and violence we do to each other through laws, morals, and simply not acting.

His legacy, I think, is that our understanding of speech, of words, and our constant questioning of their meaning and use is our only outlet to discovering potential truths, to exposing lies, and perhaps building a world that's a little nicer to live in, or at least, a little more amusing. It is, perhaps, a call to action, to understand that he was bitterly disappointed in how passive most people are in the face of injustice. In that respect, those of us who are political activists, or even those of us who are just trying to make small changes in our lives, could learn from Carlin to keep thinking and to be the gadfly that won't let things rest, to tell the truth about the world in which we live.

Carlin, of course, put it best:

"Here's the Secret News:  
 All people are afraid.  
 No one knows what they're doing.  
 Everything is getting worse.  
 Some people deserve to die.  
 Your money is worthless.  
 No one is properly dressed.  
 At least one of your children will disappoint you.  
 The system is rigged.  
 Your house will never be completely clean.  
 All teachers are incompetent.  
 There are people who really dislike you.  
 Nothing is as good as it seems.  
 Things don't last.  
 No one is paying attention.  
 The country is dying.  
 God doesn't care.  
 Shhhhhh."

# CONTROVERSY AT AZUL

RON LINDEN

“Controversy,” a group exhibition on view through August 17th at Gallery Azul in San Pedro, serves up a potpourri of mostly young, emerging artists seizing the “opportunity to provoke people into thinking about issues which affect the world.” Located in the studio of Ray Vasquez and Cora Ramirez-Vasquez, Gallery Azul has won a loyal following of South Bay artists, musicians, and enthusiasts. Midway into its second year of operation, Azul effectively promotes and inspires dialogue and participation.

Featuring the work of nineteen artists, “Controversy” is primarily a painting exhibition rife with the influences of many “controversials” from George Grosz to Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo to L.A. provocateur Robbie Conal. Standouts include Hector Silva’s giclee prints derived from tightly rendered drawings that

address alienation and disjunction in the Latino community with clarity and precision. “Latino Vote,” “Six Dollar Bag of Terror,” and “G.I. Jose” are quiet in presentation, loud in content. Danyol’s “Michelle Still Loves God” is a cartoon-like portrait of a lost ex-girlfriend painted over a collaged ground of yellowed hymnal pages. The innocence of 1940’s style rendering is subverted by the material of its facture. Artist/curator Ray Vasquez’ two-panel work “Vicissitudes” charts change by depicting the familiar image of shoes hanging by their laces. The larger of two canvasses dispassionately portrays infants’ shoes hung from a line, while below a much smaller canvas deadpans a worn pair of kids’ basketball sneakers. Steven Amado, aka Chatismo, shows “Revoltosos,” a handsomely executed mixed media piece, which functions much like a nostalgic bulletin board. Many works are accompanied by wall-mounted text, too often necessary to decipher them.

“Controversy,” however, is hardly controversial. Despite the curator’s open invitation, only occa-

sionally does a hint of true polemic surface. Naivete, while sometimes a technical asset (straightforward in style, avoidance of subtlety or convention), here is a conceptual liability. What’s missing? The lessons learned from examining signature episodes of “political art” from the Paris Commune of 1871 to German Expressionism, Soviet Productivism and the Situationists of the late 1960’s would be useful here. Forty years on from the revolutionary fervor of 1968, it’s as if a cultural amnesia has set in. What about Guston, Rauschenberg, Golub, and Beuys, Nauman and Merz? Or Barbara Kruger, Nancy Spero? Or Los Angeles’ Center for the study of Political Graphics? Abu Ghraib, Fallujah, Katrina, Darfur, et al, and their associate horrors are conspicuously absent as subject matter. Perhaps a visit to the Peter Saul Exhibition, currently at the Orange County Museum of Art, is in order.

Ron Linden is an artist who lives in San Pedro.



# JOHN CUSACK'S WAR

**JEREMY SCAHILL**

Back in 1989, in his smash hit "Say Anything," John Cusack famously stood with a boom box above his head outside the home of the woman he loved blasting Peter Gabriel's "In Your Eyes." With his latest films on the Iraq war, Cusack is standing outside Hollywood with a TV above his head broadcasting his political movies calling on the public to wake up and "Do Something."

John Cusack began working on his new film, "War, Inc.," about a year into the U.S. occupation of Iraq. From the moment tanks rolled into Baghdad, Cusack was a voracious consumer of news about the war. He took it deadly seriously, regularly calling independent journalists and asking them questions, seeking as much independent information as he could. Watching the insanity of the erection of the Green Zone and the advent of the era of McWar, complete with tens of thousands of "private contractors," Cusack set out to use the medium of film to unveil the madness. He wanted to do on the big screen what independent reporters like Naomi Klein, Nir Rosen and Dahr Jamail do in print. Over these years of war and occupation, Cusack has become one of the most insightful commentators on a far too seldom discussed aspect of the occupation: the corporate dominance of the U.S. war machine.

Cusack is no parachute humanitarian. While he continues to do the Hollywood thing with big budget movies, he is simultaneously a fierce un-embedded actor/filmmaker who has been at the center of two of the best films to date dealing with the madness of the Iraq war. Without big money sponsors and the backing of powerful production companies, Cusack has spent a lot of his own money on these projects. Cusack's film "Grace is Gone" was one of the most under-rated and under-viewed movies of 2007. Cusack should have been se-

riously considered for an Oscar for his portrayal of Stanley Philipps, a man whose wife dies while deployed as a soldier in Iraq. The film centers on Philipps' painful inability to explain to his two young daughters (powerfully played by two amateur actors, Shélan O'Keefe and Gracie Bednarczyk) their mother's death. Instead of telling his daughters the terrible news, he embarks on a surreal road trip to a theme park with the girls as he fights for his own sanity and grapples with his own support for the war that has just taken the life of his wife. The film is a jolting picture of a man caught in the free fall of a nervous breakdown and the ricochet impact of the death of soldiers in the war. It was an outright shame that "Grace is Gone" did not get wide distribution. I was at a screening of the film in New York and there were not many dry eyes at the movie's conclusion.

Perhaps the film's lack of commercial success was due to the so-called "Iraq movie fatigue" that took hold in Hollywood a couple of years ago. But "Grace is Gone" is not simply an "Iraq movie" or a "war movie." It isn't even really an "anti-war" movie. It is a haunting and moving film that cuts across political lines to tell the story of the suffering and shattering of so many U.S. military families with loved ones deployed in Iraq. Had it received the distribution it deserved, "Grace is Gone" would have resonated strongly with both supporters and opponents of the war, a rare accomplishment.

"War, Inc." is a radically different kind of movie. In fact, it really defies genre. It is sort of like this generation's "Dr. Strangelove," "A Clockwork Orange" and "The Wizard of Oz" mixed together with the un-embedded reporting of Naomi Klein, spiced up with a dash of "South Park." It is a powerful, visionary response to the cheerleading culture of the corporate media and a pliant Hollywood afraid of its own shadow.

On the surface, "War, Inc." appears to be a spoof of the corporatization of the occupation of Iraq. Cusack plays a hit man, Brand Hauser, deployed to Turaqistan with the mission of killing a Middle Eastern oil

baron (named Omar Sharif). Hauser's employer is a secretive for-profit military corporation run by the former U.S. vice president, played by Dan Aykroyd. We first meet Aykroyd's character as he sits, pants down, on a toilet seat during a closed-circuit satellite video-conference call to give Hauser his mission. Hauser arrives in the Turaqi capital and heads for the "Emerald City" (read: the Green Zone), where his cover is director of a trade show for the military corporation, Tamerlane, which is basically running the Turaqi occupation. Hauser soon falls for a progressive journalist, played by Marisa Tomei, who is in Turaqistan to investigate Tamerlane, and what follows is an insane ride through Cusack's interpretation of the radical corporatization of war.

Singer Hilary Duff gives a surprisingly fun performance as a pop star, Yonica Baby Yeah, who performs a song in the war zone with the lyrics, "You say you want to invade me, baby/Enslave me, baby." As Duff delivers the song, she caresses a phallic gas nozzle decorated with diamonds while singing, "I want to blow you...up." Obviously Cusack and his co-writers, Mark Leyner and Jeremy Pikser ("Reds," "Bulworth"), sought to tap into the extreme nature of the corporatized war and take it to another level, but anyone who thinks the premise behind "War Inc." is "over-the-top" has not been paying attention to real life.

Cusack, Leyner and Pikser are not predicting the future, they are forcefully—and with dark humor and wit—branding the present for what it is: the Wal-Mart-ization of life (and death) represented in the new U.S. model for waging war. With 630 corporations like Blackwater and Halliburton on the U.S. government payroll in Iraq getting 40% of the more than \$2 billion Washington spends every week on the occupation, Cusack's "futuristic" film is not far from the way things really are. A powerful, for-profit war corporation, run by the former U.S. vice president "owning" the war zone; tanks with NASCAR-like sponsor logos speeding around the streets firing at will; "implanted journalists" watching the war in IMAX theaters in

the heavily-fortified “Emerald City” to get “full spectrum sensory reality” while eating popcorn; a secretive “viceroy” running the show from behind a digital curtain, are all part of Cusack’s battlefield in the fictitious Turaqistan. But how far are they from the realities of the radically privatized corporate war machine Washington has unleashed on the world?

“War, Inc.” is already an un-

derground cult classic and will likely remain so for years to come. The film is not without its shortcomings—at times it is confusing and drags—but its faults are significantly overshadowed by its many strengths. It also accomplishes the difficult feat of being very entertaining and funny, while delivering a powerful punch of truth. “War, Inc.” is a movie that deserves a much wider viewing than the barons of the

film industry are likely to give it. But by filling the theaters in the opening days, people can send a powerful message that there is—and must be—a market for films of conscience.

Jeremy Scahill is the author of *Blackwater: The Rise of the World’s Most Powerful Mercenary Army*.

**John Cusack  
Hilary Duff  
Marisa Tomei  
Joan Cusack  
Dan Aykroyd  
and Ben Kingsley**

**WAR,  
INC.**

**An incendiary political cartoon.**

**When it comes to war... America means business.**

**“Really funny...  
with great dialogue and actors able to make it sing. Reminded me of the kind of filmmaking Billy Wilder, Stanley Kubrick have done in the past. Recalls movies like Dr. Strangelove and Wag the Dog. I love this kind of cynical, acerbic moviemaking and seeing it reminds me just how much this kind of thing is missing today.”**  
—Peter Hartman, *The Office Magazine*

**“War, Inc. is one of those mystifying cinematic works that defies categorization. Its constant genre-hopping from satire to soap opera to piercing sincerity leaves the audience feeling literally shell-shocked. Just like the experience of watching Brecht’s *Mother Courage*, you feel the chaos of war and its profiteers, but on a global and far more sinister corporate level. Surprising, shocking and one to keep you mulling for hours...”**  
—Uncut Gems, *Uncut Gems*

**“One of those rare satires with the danger left in. It cranks up the dial on the state of privatized war just enough that we can finally see our present clearly. As you’re watching it, you can’t help wondering: can these guys really get away with this? It’s an extremely good feeling. It’s what risk feels like.”**  
—Naomi Klein, *Author, The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism and How Big Corporations Take Advantage of the World in Crisis*







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## GALLERY CALENDAR

JUNE 28TH - AUGUST 17TH GROUP SHOW "CONTROVERSY"

AUGUST 30TH - OCTOBER 19TH "ARTURO SANDOVAL"

OCTOBER 1ST - NOVEMBER 16TH GROUP SHOW "DIA DE LOS MUERTOS"

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