

Liberty

Why Jonny
Cant Reed

May 2010

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The Deepening Obamalaize

by Gary Jason

Chavez Says Jump

by Michael Owen

Laissez-Faire Justice

by Brian J. Gladish

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Letters

Freed Market

Edmund Contoski's article "Our Forefathers' Failure" (March) was excellent! I went to public schools until my sophomore year of high school and then a private school (run by a conservative church) thereafter. This was the first I heard of the free-market reforms enacted by the colonists in Plymouth and Jamestown. The versions I was taught said that the colonists' sudden success was either a mystery or solely the doing of some of the friendly Native Americans. The Mayflower Compact was depicted as an ideal model for society and not the failure that it was. Thank you, Mr. Contoski, for reminding us of our free-market roots and the power that the free market has when it is allowed to work.

Paul L. Booth
Boonsboro, MD

With a Little Help

Gary Jason is wrong when he says that Sarah Palin wrote "Going Rogue" herself. Numerous media reports (and not anonymous ones) state that the book was ghostwritten by Lynn Vincent and that Palin flew to San Diego several times to work with her ghostwriter. If Jason has evidence that Vincent had nothing to do with the book, he should present it.

Martin Morse Wooster
Silver Spring, MD

Jason responds: Mr. Wooster apparently misread what I wrote in my review. I said that there were rumors Palin's book had been ghosted, but that it appeared

to me that the writing was in her voice, and with her background in journalism she didn't need one. I never said I knew one way or the other. Nor do I care.

The More Things Change . . .

Bruce Ramsey's "The Obama Regime: Year One" (March) reminds me that it seems only yesterday President Obama and a Democratic majority in Congress rode to victory in 2008 by promising to control deficit spending and eliminate earmarking.

Talk is cheaper than action. President Obama and a Democratic Congress continue to conduct business as usual. Consider: \$787 billion in stimulus, a request for a \$266 billion second stimulus, \$1 trillion in health care, and \$200 billion to stop global warming.

With the Democrats controlling the White House and both houses of Congress, the deficit has increased by \$1.75 trillion in less than one year. Now, they want to add an additional \$1.8 trillion, raising the debt to \$14.3 trillion.

The proposed FY 2010 appropriations bill to fund federal agencies includes over 5,200 member item earmarked projects worth \$4 billion. President Obama promised an end to this pork-barrel spending frenzy. Sadly, he has failed to be a profile in courage and use the veto as he promised. He clearly doesn't intend to take on Harry Reid and Nancy Pelosi.

New York's own Sen. Schumer sees nothing wrong with Democrats promoting excessive spending and earmarking, pointing out that Republicans

Letters to the editor

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did the same. While that is true, that hardly justifies making the same mistakes again.

The change promised by Obama, Reid, and Pelosi is nonexistent. The famous K Street Washington lobbyists have just moved across the street from Republican to Democrat.

The taxpayers' Tea Party Movement clearly illustrates that many Americans still desire real leadership, fiscal discipline, free enterprise, pay as you go, means testing for recipients of federal aid, balanced budgets and a reduction in the size of government.

The Democratic political tide which resulted in their winning large numbers of Senate and Congressional seats in 2008 has begun to recede in 2010, starting in Massachusetts with the election of Scott Brown. The taxpayers are seeking a refund.

Larry Penner
Great Neck, NY

The Kennedy Seat

Stephen Cox's article on the Massachusetts election ("The Threshold Effect," April) did not disappoint. What intrigued me was that his thesis expanded on a flippant suggestion I made last September that no Kennedy chose to run for that seat because they had probably polled the voters and found that the traditional Kennedy support was no longer there.

This election, coupled with Patrick Kennedy's recent decision not to run for reelection, makes me think this may have been accurate.

Cox is undoubtedly correct in noting the extreme arrogance of the present day politicians, their contempt for the voting public, and the upper-class "Gatsby" snobbery it entails. But there's an additional dimension to this when discussing this phenomenon with respect to the likes of the Kennedys and Rockefellers, which is that the ultra-wealthy blue-blooded aristocracy only enter politics when they are either guaranteed to win, or — in the case of Steve Forbes — know they are going to lose and can afford to burn through their unlimited supply of cash to make their point and spread their message.

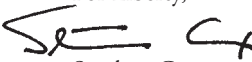
Virtually all politicians today, especially senators and governors, view themselves as being above the general public, and the primary perk of their profession is that they never have to deign to associate with them. In the case of the Kennedys and Rockefellers, that means never having to agree to debate one's opponent (that requires preparation, which represents hard work you want to avoid), or God forbid, actually having to go out on the street and meet with the general public. They only like politics when it's confined to \$1,000 a plate dinners at exclusive country clubs

From the Editor

As I write, Congress continues its convulsive deliberations on the healthcare bill. We hear a lot of noise coming from behind the curtain, and we can imagine still more of the scene back there: votes being bought with threats and promises and allusions to federal judgeships and suggestions that one's constituents might not be happy if they knew all the events of one's sex life or investment program. We remember the distinguished solon who recently gave his vote in exchange for his state's immunity from rules intended for the other 49 states. As I say, we can imagine a lot more — and if we do, we will probably be right.

It's interesting to think what would happen if you tried to run a business in the way that Congress is run. Not only is the congressional sausage making process remarkably ugly; even its advertising is hazardous to one's health, unless one thrives on a diet of lies. And it all originates with politicians who aspire to control the business, especially the medical business, of the country.

At Liberty, we have no means of persuasion such as politicians have. We can't threaten you, and we have no intention of lying to you. All we can promise is reason, and a certain charm. But I think that's what you prefer.

For Liberty,

Stephen Cox

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with pre-selected guests — meticulously screened by security guards — who are thrilled just to be in their presence and will mindlessly applaud whatever they say.

Their goal is to be a senator or governor, without having to do any of the work themselves. And when the race tightens up, they have to decide whether they want to do the actual grunt work, risking getting their fingernails dirty, and even losing. In the Kennedys' case, one can easily imagine one of these three scenarios: willing to run, but not to debate or campaign outside of the country club circuit; willing to debate, but not campaign with the general public; willing to both debate and campaign with the general public, but not willing to risk a close race, or even a defeat.

The last scenario is the most frightening to the bluebloods. Actually having to get out and mix with the voting public. Standing in front of the camera as you shake hands and converse with obese unemployed blue-collar workers who have more fingers than teeth, complaining about their plight as they inadvertently spray saliva all over your face. You also risk the random heckling of bystanders shouting obscenities as they try disrupt the staged proceedings and get on camera.

You dread the thought of one of them shouting racist insults against "those damned illegals stealing our jobs" (generating a unanimous resounding cheer from the crowd) and the deer-in-the-headlights blank stare the local TV news cameras will capture on your face as you take seemingly forever to decide between admonishing the language used — thus risking turning the mob against you — or letting it pass without comment, knowing you'll face charges of pandering to racists from the media-elitist talking heads for the next week.

Perhaps the worst-case scenario is someone who is crazy enough to leap from the crowd to attack you. In this case you are forced to endure both the risk to your physical safety and to your legal liability, resulting in headlines that read, "Man hospitalized after Kennedy security guards wrestle him to the ground files lawsuit against candidate."

Even if you survive all this, would it be worth it if you win in by a nail-biting

47–45 margin, with the press unanimously and cynically concluding that presence of the third-party candidate gave you the victory, and the subsequent rumors that his campaign was secretly funded by your organization?

Politics today — while financed by the upper classes — is now largely in the operational hands of the middle-class, who are willing to endure these unavoidable risks and indignities during their campaigns, in exchange for the privilege of being exempt from their company during their term in office once elected. For them it's like gaining access to the exclusive "Members Only" country club without having to pay to join.

While I generally agree with Cox's line of reasoning — that Massachusetts voters ultimately objected to being treated like objects and herded like cattle — I also think these events were primarily driven by the bear market economy and the general public dissatisfaction it has generated. In a bull market I can easily envision things going the other way — an easy Democratic victory accompanied by overwhelming cynical media sarcasm about the generic wall-papered dead white European male mannequin ("he looks he like finished third in the Dan Quayle act-alike contest") the Republicans put up against Coakley.

What neither Cox nor I can explain is why the Republicans' "Had Enough?" slogan didn't work — or wouldn't have worked — for them in 1934, '36, '38, '40, '42 or '44. We all wish voters were logical and rational, but we also know that they aren't. When the tide finally turns, we immediately jump to the conclusion that the voters finally decided to become logical and rational. Cox's thesis that Massachusetts voters objected to being treated like objects and herded like cattle appeals to any decent person's senses. Yet these same Massachusetts voters were treated like objects and herded like cattle by the Kennedy machine for two generations, with their overwhelming consent.

If any one of us were smart enough to be able to explain the intricacies of American politics, he would easily be able to be elected president. Yet, for some reason, the overwhelming majority of the intelligentsia concludes that the president's problems — whoever he is, regardless of the party he comes

from — stem from the fact that he doesn't understand politics. Either U.S. presidents, or the intelligentsia, didn't take Logic 101 in college, didn't pass it, or were wealthy and privileged enough to hire someone to take the final exam for them.

Gerry Smedinghoff
Phoenix, AZ

Pricey Peace

Thank you for Don Crawford's piece "In the dark" (Reflections, March). I'd like to echo his experience; I have fired my sleep clinic and turned to the World Wide Web. The sleep study was a high-tech, very informative piece of work, done by competent, motivated medical techs, and the doctor's diagnosis worked, both times. (Be sure that you get a copy of the doctor's report. The bottom line of the testing is to determine whether the device will help you sleep at all, and what pressure it should be set for.) The study was billed separately and cost several thousand dollars — I've lost the details. In the patient-support phase I recall that I was charged \$300 a month for about two years to pay for a CPAP machine that costs about \$650 from a web store — roughly ten times the retail cost. Sometimes you can get one even cheaper on Craigslist. Then, if you accept the clinic's "free" mask-and-tube services, it's another monthly charge.

The process seems to go like this: bill these exorbitant prices to the patient, get mostly refused by patient's insurance company, and still profit hugely. I think my insurance authorized about twice the retail cost of the machine. The prices seem fully justified by the Medicare pricing guidelines for Durable Medical Equipment, of the form "you may charge up to x dollars per month for up to y months." I wasn't able to find what x and y are for CPAP machines or supplies.

The remaining problem is that the web stores have recently begun requiring a doctor's prescription to order anything, even replacement mask parts. But if you can get a prescription from a helpful doctor, you can order what you need without further obscene costs.

Truly, as Don says, the medical system is hugely out of whack.

Bill Cox
Alameda, CA

Reflections

Funny girl — In the February 23 issue of the Huffington Post is an article by “actress/singer/composer/activist” Barbra Streisand. It’s called “Elections Should Be Won — Not Bought.” In it, we learn that Streisand believes no individual should be allowed to contribute more than \$100 to any candidate.

I suppose if I could get my ideas published for free in the Huffington Post as easily as Streisand does, I might think that’s reasonable too.

— Ted Levy

The way to her heart — Here’s another reason to cheer Sarah Palin’s humiliation in the CPAC straw poll at the hands of Ron Paul. No doubt, Palin’s questioners at Fox News were nodding in agreement when she said the following: “Say [Obama] decided to declare war on Iran, I think people would perhaps shift their thinking a little bit and decide, well, maybe he’s tougher than we think he is today.”

— David Beito

The wages of tyranny — I’d put the blame for the magnitude of Haiti’s problems 100% at the feet of its government. It’s not the geology, nor that this earthquake was the strongest ever, nor a lack of building codes. The devastation is due to the government having kept the place so dirt poor for so long, they simply have nothing to help them cope with the event.

If the same thing happened in a wealthier society, there would be a lot of damage, lots of problems, a great deal of inconvenience — but it wouldn’t have killed hundreds of thousands of people. These Haitians are so poor, they don’t even have shovels to dig people out. They don’t even have crowbars to pry apart collapsed walls; they have to do it with their own bare hands — and they don’t even have gloves. They’ve got nothing.

So, of course there was widespread devastation. There were no savings. No food set aside. No water set aside. These people are living, literally, hand-to-mouth. So, if there’s a natural disaster, the impact is magnified by several orders of magnitude because of the poverty — and that’s due entirely to the government. And, idiotically, people you see on TV are looking to the government to solve the problem . . . the stupidity of the chattering classes leaves me thunderstruck.

I mean, the Dominican Republic next door is hardly

any glowing beacon of freedom, but it’s vastly better than Haiti, and it’s got the same geography, climate, and so forth, so it’s all a matter of government. That’s illustrated equally well with the differences between East and West Germany, North and South Korea . . . there are many examples throughout time and across space. And now they’re looking to the Haitian government to be in charge of rebuilding the place . . . the concept is literally insane.

— Doug Casey

Petitioning the job god — Extending unemployment benefits is nothing more than a political tactic. Since the federal government has no money, all it can do is move capital from productive sectors into unproductive ones. But it is difficult to tell that to people when they have a family to feed and no job. Proponents of the extension refuse to acknowledge that sometimes there are no good solutions — not everything can be fixed.

Keynesian economics is the modern version of sacrificing grain to the harvest god in the hope of a more prosperous harvest the following year. Realistically, it will only lessen the amount of grain there is to eat, even if it makes people feel like they were doing something to help.

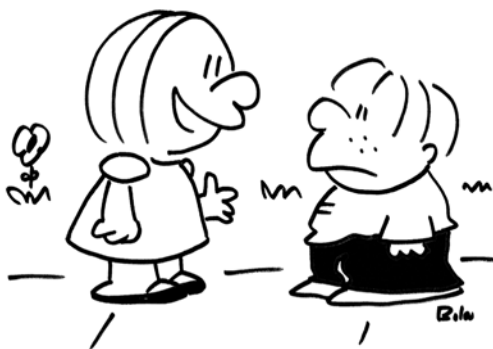
— Tim Slagle

Homeland secured — Do you remember when the PATRIOT Act was controversial? It seems to me at one time that there was quite a fuss raised about it, but fortunately time has smoothed that over and none of the predicted “abuses of power” have ever come to pass.

In the final week of February, President Obama put his signature to a reauthorization of the act, and so for another year the power of the government to protect our national security remains absolute and inviolate. There was some noise about possibly putting some “checks” or “restrictions” in place. But that came only from the extremists — probably terrorist sympathizers, like those insidious lawyers Liz Cheney warned us about, the ones who defended enemies of America at Guantanamo. And now that we know who they are, we can keep a watch on them in the future. Hell, we can tap their phones and monitor all their internet activity if we need to, or even if we just feel like it!

Don’t you feel safer already? — Andrew Ferguson

The answer, my friend — In a Reflection I wrote



“If Mom says no, you ask Dad — it’s called the ‘checks and balances’ system.”

about a year ago, I noted that wind power has proven to have an unfavorable effect on the environment — it kills lots of birds who fly into the turbines. I facetiously referred to this phenomenon as “shredded tweet.” In a Reflection written for last month’s issue of *Liberty*, I noted that wind power is (as I put it sarcastically, using a show biz term) a “triple threat”: it is ugly, unreliable, and hugely expensive.

It now appears that I have been overly charitable in my assessment. A piece by Robert Bryce in *The Wall Street Journal* (March 1) points to another drawback of wind farms: they pose a health risk to humans. Articles are appearing in newspapers — especially rural ones — around the world, indicating that wind turbines are making it impossible for many people to sleep. Such reports have appeared in papers in many cities in Australia, Canada, England, France, and New Zealand, as well as the United States.

The turbines typically emit a deep pulsing sound that, the reports claim, causes insomnia and other ailments, such as headaches and dizziness. Put a pack of these turbines together, and the noise apparently becomes unbearable for many people within a mile or two of the wind

farm. We are not thinking about one or two cases; many hundreds of complaints have been filed here and abroad about the noise pollution that wind power generates.

As a response, groups of people opposing wind power have sprung up as fast as the wind itself. Canada has about 25 anti-wind groups, the United States about a hundred, and Europe now almost 400.

Predictably, wind industry groups (such as the American Wind Energy Association) heatedly deny that there is any basis in medical science for the claim that noise pollution caused by wind turbines poses any health risk. But this issue is only now being investigated by medical doctors and other researchers.

If it turns out that epidemiological studies do establish a link, you will quickly see an interesting split in the Democratic Party coalition. The trial lawyers will start suing the hell out of the very source of power that the environmentalists are pushing to replace fossil fuels and nuclear power.

What a tantalizing thought.

— Gary Jason

Change for the worse — Feb. 19, 2010: On Fox News, former Attorney General John Ashcroft responds to

Word Watch

by Stephen Cox

The world of words is like a banana republic — a scene of turmoil in which low and common entities constantly compete for power. You can tell what kind of regime you live under when you observe which ones come out on top.

Barbara Branden has written to remind Word Watch of an entity that currently enjoys great prominence in America’s banana republic of letters. It’s the word *incentivize*. The expression is far too prominent for Barbara’s taste, and her taste is good. In objecting to it, however, she must know that she is *incentivizing* its users to *push back* against her *partisan opposition*. Even now, the Federales may be massing around her door, ready to take her into custody and remove her to that land from which literate persons do not return.

But here’s something to think about. While Barbara lives strictly in the private sphere, I work for a public university — yet even in my shop, people are continually being “incentivized,” as if they worked for the Acme Widget Corp. Maybe that’s a good thing; at least my colleagues and I are being encouraged to do some work. Nevertheless, one look at *incentivize* tells you a lot about the nature of our society, and it’s not a pretty picture.

This is a society in which one thing just sort of leads to another thing, usually in an ugly, bureaucratic way; a society in which boring Greek and Latin nouns transform themselves without warning into weird and freaky adjectives, which are never perceived as weird and freaky but are eagerly accepted by all the best people in all the best social positions. I’m not sure that literary critics qualify for any of those positions, since I’m a literary critic, but it’s wonderful to see how willingly we paragons of literacy suck up expressions like *problematize* and *thematize*, words that appear to mean little more than “give emphasis to.”

Ours is a society in which unnecessary verbal complications

are thought to indicate intelligence, not stupidity or confusion. That’s why you must never suggest that people at work should be “encouraged” or “rewarded” or “allowed to profit”; instead, you must say that they need to be “incentivized.” If you do so, both your brains and your sensitivity will be admired, and the employees won’t feel that they are being *marginalized*. It’s assumed, though without sufficient evidence, that they won’t suspect they’re being patronized, either.

Ours is also an increasingly socialist society — a society of “rugged collectivism,” as Martin Luther King described it. In such a closely packed society, words spread like diseases, and with similarly ill effects.

Today I went to a faculty meeting in which one person happened to use the term “drill into.” He said, “Our committee wasn’t charged to drill into all the details of the 2010–2011 budget.” So far, I had no objection. It wasn’t a bad image, especially if you come from oil country, as my family did. But here’s the problem. During the next 60 minutes, ten other people decided to use that expression. First it was “I think you were right not to drill too deeply.” Then it was “We need another committee, to drill more deeply.” After that came “We need another committee, one which will really settle down and drill deep into the insides of this whole issue of transparency in this budget that’s now here before us.” At last there erupted a heartfelt, truly personal expression — which was couched, alas, in what had become the language of the collective: “I’m determined to drill into this budget until I find the truth!”

But I wondered: would the speaker have had the emotion, if he hadn’t been given the phrase?

Anyway, here’s another word that illustrates the power of the collective: *nimble*. It’s an Obama administration word.

the question of whether he thinks we are safer now than we were during the Bush years:

I believe we ought to maximize our safety so we can exercise freely our liberty, and I don't believe in trading off liberty for safety. I believe the purpose of safety is to secure liberty. And whether we're more or less than we used to be isn't the question. The question is: could we be safer if we adopted different policies, and if we were to adopt those different policies, would it make our liberty an enhanced liberty and give us a better opportunity to reach the objectives we have, and I believe we should always be on the lookout to improve the safety and security of American liberty. That's what the responsibility of government is all about.

Feb. 17, 1775: Benjamin Franklin, not responding to Fox News: "They who can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety, deserve neither liberty nor safety."

— Ted Levy

For the Gipper — Few people understand what the Tea Party movement is all about. Although at first glance it appears to be a collection of antitax conservatives, what is really going on is far more profound. To understand it, turn back to the Reagan revolution of the 1980s.

Reagan's 1980 election resulted from a coalition of tra-

ditional conservatives and libertarians, two groups that were at least allies on fiscal issues. But the 1980s also saw the rise of a new faction that called itself neoconservative. Neoconservatives are primarily military hawks, but they are also fiscal liberals. This means they really didn't fit into the Reagan revolution at all.

George W. Bush ran for president by appealing to the traditional conservatives and libertarians who made up the backbone of Reagan's support. But after gaining office, Bush proved to be a neocon, making war in Iraq and supporting prescription drug entitlements and other costly programs.

After the 2008 election, libertarian-conservative leaders such as Grover Norquist and David Koch resolved to rebuild the Reagan coalition, but without the neocons. Tea parties were the result. We can only hope that upcoming candidates get it and focus on fiscal conservatism both in their campaigns and after they take office.

— Randal O'Toole

Redefining the market — "I am an ardent believer in the free market." An *ardent* believer. So said President Obama to the Business Roundtable on Feb. 24.

President Obama used it to describe the type of government he prefers. Then his cronies picked it up, and it spread throughout the country. We can be thankful for one thing: it isn't another Greco-Latin word. It derives from a common Anglo-Saxon verb, "niman," meaning "to take or seize" — something that makes it very relevant to the current administration, which would like to take or seize almost anything that isn't nailed down.

Of course, that's not how the president wants the word to be understood. He wants his administration to be seen as busy and efficient, like a troop of Boy Scouts, always jumping around, doing good for everyone. So he seized on "nimble" to describe the kind of "programs" he wants. And now, because he used that word, every "automotive service center" is emitting spam that touts its "nimble customer interactions," and every corporate bureaucracy is putting "a nimble response to contemporary challenges" into its mission statement.

This happened all at once. As in the Coleridge poem, "The Sun's rim dips ; the stars rush out : / At one stride comes the dark." "Nimble" started as a humble private in the army of words. It was an adjective applied chiefly to the anthropoid apes. Then suddenly, because Obama cited it, the word became Sergeant Nimble, Lieutenant Nimble, Colonel Nimble, General Nimble, Generalissimo Nimble, President of the Republic and Commander of All Its Forces Nimble.

But there are other verbal warlords, some of which have hung on, like grim death, for decades. This column has previously mentioned the omnipresence of "appropriate," a word that now appears to mean nothing more than "I agree with it" or "He got away with it." Thus the common police report: "Officer Jones took appropriate action." Or the damning report that is fed to the newspapers when Officer Jones has visibly screwed up: "We are taking all legal measures to get at the truth about Officer Jones's inappropriate actions." (My advice: *drill into it*.)

All of this takes place under the banner of emotional cor-

rectness — a leading feature of socialist societies, where nothing is good or evil but only appropriate or inappropriate to its emotional surroundings. That's the idea that must have inspired Joe Stack's daughter, when she described his method of protesting against the IRS. Stack, as you'll recall, set his home on fire, then flew an airplane into the IRS office in Austin, Texas. It was a peculiar, a very peculiar, thing to do. It was an evil thing to do, no matter what he was protesting. But the culprit's daughter, who lives in Norway and has evidently caught the tone of the American social democracy as well, said that it was . . . "inappropriate."

So much for Joe Stack and his daughter. I return to the life and descent of words. Like prominent political leaders, prominent phrases tend to have large, unruly families. Some of their descendants may even marry outside the Party. You'll remember, a few years ago, when "on the back of" became popular in leftwing circles. It was continually being said that "Bush wants to balance his budget on the back of the American middle class," "Boosh is waging his imperialism on the back of the peoples of the world," "Boosh is conducting Satanic rituals on the back of starving inhabitants of Pitcairn Island," and so forth. Then scions of "on the back of" began mating with scions of Republicans. So we got, "Obama wants to balance his budget on the back of the American middle class." Now we're seeing a new generation of the Back clan, and we find that it has grievously degenerated, as wealthy families almost always do. In his February 19 television program, Glenn Beck, the scourge of all things leftish, called upon his viewers to "break the back of the leech that's on our back."

All right; let's see about this. Beck was referring to government schools and government-school unions. Fine. But picture a leech. If necessary, go to Wikipedia or someplace else and find out what leeches look like. Then picture a leech's back. That's hard, because leeches are sort of strange. Or maybe we humans are strange, and leeches are normal. Never mind. Picture a leech

"You create the jobs," he said, adding that government has "a vital, if limited, role to play" in creating the conditions for entrepreneurs to create jobs.

He even used the s-word. "We have arrived at a juncture in our politics where reasonable efforts to update our regulations, or make basic investments in our future, are too often greeted with cries of 'government takeover' or even 'socialism,'" he said.

I don't think Obama is a socialist. He's not going to take over General Motors or the Wall Street investment houses. He does, however, have a deep belief in government's role in shaping American life, from the insulation in people's houses to the fatness of their children. And also the management of — and the freedom of — the market.

— Bruce Ramsey

Take no prisoners — Ever since its inception, utopian socialist ideology has included calls for the elimination of prisons. Many of the early idealists, such as the Ukrainian left-anarchist Nestor Makhno, believed that prisons were a result of unjust societies; therefore, a just society would inevitably lead to their eradication.

Lenin and Stalin, while recognizing the interim usefulness of prisons and still giving lip service to the ultimate ideal, took a more pragmatic approach. They instituted policies — starvation, terminal labor, hypothermia, etc. — to eliminate existing prison populations so as to expedite the ideal outcome. But they went even further. By summarily executing suspects before their incarceration, particularly during the Red Terror of the Russian Civil War — voila! — they ensured that there would be no one to lock up; ergo, no prisons.

Barack Obama, in his enthusiasm to close down George W. Bush's Guantanamo Bay holding tank for combat-captured jihadists, is tacking awfully close to that ill wind. The February 27 issue of *The Economist* reports that Obama "does not want to add to the problem [of Guantanamo] by bringing more foreign jihadists into American custody. Instead, American forces are either

killing them or letting less squeamish allies detain them. This seems to be the rule, not the exception."

A recent Washington Post investigation into the matter found "dozens of targeted killings and no reports of high-value detentions" by American forces. Last September, the U.S. pinpointed Saleh Ali Nabhan, one of the jihadists responsible for the 1998 U.S. embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania, in Somalia, coordinating strategy between al Qaeda and its Somali ally, al-Shabab. As *The Economist* makes clear, "Had he been captured and questioned, he could have been a mine of useful intelligence." Instead, "American helicopters vaporized him."

After Milton Friedman was criticized for helping the Pinochet regime design a liberal, free-market economy for Chile's transition out of the Allende years, some libertarians defended his involvement with the dictator by observing that economic liberty was more fundamental than civil liberty; that, given a choice, people would gladly sacrifice their right to vote for the opportunity to earn money to survive. Are the lives (not to mention the intelligence) of jihadists being sacrificed for their putative "civil rights" (a meaningless detail if you're dead) in the pursuit of closing Guantanamo? Following the post-Allende logic, I value life itself way over civil rights.

Of course, suspected terrorists caught on American soil are taken into American custody, but those lucky few captured abroad who escape vaporization end up in Iraqi, Afghan, or Pakistani prisons. Human rights activists who once thought Obama was their man are not amused. Do I miss W yet? Don't ask and I won't lie. — Robert H. Miller

Greco-German wrestling — In an open letter the German tabloid *Bild* has reminded Greek Prime Minister George Papandreou of the two countries' differences: "Here, people work until they are 67 and there is no 14th-month salary for civil servants. Here, nobody needs to pay a €1,000 bribe to get a hospital bed in time . . . Germany also has high debts but we can settle them.

as if it had a back. Now picture "the leech that's on our back." That's harder. Harder still is picturing us breaking the back of the leech that's on our back. But this will give you an idea of what the Back family is today.

Did Beck come up with this nonsense himself? No — it's all part of the collective illiteracy. When King mentioned "rugged collectivism," he knew what he was talking about. (I was tempted to say, "He knew that of which he spoke," but I resisted the temptation. Literacy isn't actually the same as pomposity.) Let's go to another example — the case of the Alabama professor who assassinated her colleagues because they wouldn't give her tenure.

If you have a taste for black humor, look no further than this. But you'll especially appreciate the prologue to the affair, in which the future professor shot and killed her own brother, but wasn't prosecuted — wasn't even booked — despite the fact that after wasting her brother she ran down the street with a gun and tried to make other people give her a getaway car. Years later, and after some further adventures in violent self-expression, from which she emerged scot-free, she shot her colleagues at the

University of Alabama, Huntsville. Thereafter the campus was *locked down*, as if it were a prison and the students and faculty were the offenders.

Days passed, and students returned to campus — to start issuing statements of a ruggedly collectivist character. Consider this news report of a campus interview: "I feel the campus has been pulled together, and I've seen more blue on campus than I've ever seen before," said [so and so, a student], referring to the school color." *Pulled together*: yup, that's the important thing, isn't it — that we should all be brought together, or forced together, by threat of destruction. It's an image that has long delighted the mass media, environmentalists, pacifists, science fiction writers, New Age religionists, and *caring teachers* throughout the land.

All right. I'll drill a little deeper into this news report about the wreckage left by the crazy prof. It includes a number of charming phrases. It describes a business professor as saying that "he and colleagues decided during a staff meeting last week to begin the first day of class by offering students a chance to share

That's because we get up early and work all day."

It is an excellent example of the major flaw of the European Union, and by extension one-world government. Cultural differences make it impossible for some nations to operate within the same union.

Greece should be allowed to bankrupt itself, and Germans should be allowed to work their lives away. Spaniards should keep their nap times, and the French continue to be vague on the notion of customer service. All these nations should also live with the financial results of their cultural decisions. And if those choices result in poverty, they should live with that as well. No one should be forced to subsidize laziness.

— Tim Slagle

Judge, jury, executioner — As the congressional hearings on Toyota and its recall continued, two facts emerged to reinforce the perception that there is a political agenda here.

First, GM — our very own nationalized car company — announced a large recall of its own. It recalled 1.3 million compact cars because of more than 1,100 complaints about a power steering defect. Of course, GM has quite a history of recalls, so this news isn't surprising. What's fascinating is the realization that nobody in Congress or the Obama administration has so far called for hearings. Now, why is that?

Perhaps the answer lies in a second interesting fact, reported by Mark Tapscott on Examiner.com (Los Angeles). Amazingly, of the 59 Democrats serving on the two relevant committees in the House of Representatives, 31 have received campaign donations from — drumroll please! — the United Auto Workers. Yes, the co-owner of GM and Chrysler is funding more than half the judges in these show trials.

Let's name names, shall we?

On the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, the UAW has funded: Judy Chu (D-CA), William Clay (D-MO), Gerry Connelly (D-VA), Elijah Cummings

(D-MD), Dan Davis (D-IL), Patrick Kennedy (D-RI), Chris Murphy (D-CT), Michael Quigley (D-IL), Paul Rhodes (D-NH), John Tierney (D-MA), Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), and Peter Welch (D-VT).

On the Committee on Energy and Commerce (besides Congressmen Murphy and Welch, who serve on both committees): Rick Boucher (D-VA), Bruce Braley (D-IA), Lois Capps (D-CA), Diana DeGette (D-CO), John Dingell (D-MI), Mike Doyle (D-PA), Elliot Engel (D-NY), Charles Gonzalez (D-TX), Gene Green (D-TX), Baron Hill (D-IN), Jay Inslee (D-WA), Doris Matsui (D-CA), Frank Pallone (D-NJ), Mike Ross (D-AR), Jan Schakowsky (D-IL), Bart Stupak (D-MI), and Henry Waxman (D-CA).

— Gary Jason
Executive privilege — From The New York Times: "Obama Writes Own Health Bill. Should he have done this months ago? Hoping to revive his healthcare agenda, President Obama is writing his own comprehensive health-care legislation before next week's meeting with Republicans. According to Democratic officials, Obama is writing it so that it could be passed through reconciliation and therefore skirt the threats of a Republican filibuster."

I remember learning in grade school about something called "the separation of powers," whereby the legislative branch originated the laws and the executive branch enforced them. I recall thinking that this seemed rather inefficient. I mean, surely if one is going to enforce some laws, it's better to write them oneself — how much easier that makes it to know what to enforce!

So it's good to know that we got rid of that old relic of separation of powers. We must have done so, since no one from The New York Times to Fox News has seen anything untoward about this for many years now.

— Ted Levy

Oh, Canada — The Winter Olympics recently finished in Vancouver. Every day, there were thousands and thousands of very drunk people in the streets, singing "O Canada!", doing high-fives and, in the latter days, shout-

their feelings about the shootings rather than diving right into academic lectures." *Good idea.* Heaven forbid that academics should deliver academic lectures. Instead, they should invite their students to *share their feelings*. Where have we heard that before? Where haven't we heard it?

But I wonder — what was supposed to happen in those "sharing" sessions? An evil professor slew her colleagues. What are the students supposed to say — "I'm glad she did it; I hate you all"? I don't think those feelings would be welcomed, however authentic they might be. So what feelings would be welcomed, and therefore shared? You already know: "I think it's . . . uh . . . just too bad that . . . uh . . . someone would . . . uh . . . use a gun . . . uh . . . instead of . . . uh . . . getting, you know, help . . ." Yes, when people share feelings like these, the *grieving process proceeds* and *communities are healed*. Getting students to share their feelings is so much more helpful than continuing with academic life as usual, thereby assuring students that the world isn't controlled by mere emotion, barbarous or banal.

But wait! There's more! The report continues: "A few campus

police were on hand, but officials decided against a big show of force." So here we must salute an expression that has long been a major general in the army of babble — show of force. A show of force is what happens when you object to rugged collectivism. But lookit: what the hell were those cops supposed to be doing at the University of Alabama, Huntsville? Preventing another crazed biology professor from wasting her colleagues? If so, fine. But has "show of force" become so routine in our society — even in our academic society — that nobody pays any attention to the phrase itself? At Alabama, "officials decided against a big show of force." Very nice of them. Otherwise, they might have muscled in on all those students who were intent on sharing their feelings.

One more quotation from the news item: "Counselors will be in every biology classroom as well as other classes in the Shelby Center and every classroom building on campus." Damn! Is that creepy or what? It's like Genesis 28, where God turns out to be everywhere. Or are counselors God today?

You decide. But it's certain that their lingo has risen to the top. Be forewarned: it will appear in every classroom.

ing "Fuck America." The last day was the final hockey match between Canada and America, which had been the focus of the drunken crowd's attention for several days before. "Hockey is the game of Canada," said a poster.

On that last day, the isolated American flag bearers had gone underground or disappeared in the Canadian maple leaf carrying crowd, or had perhaps even put on some maple leaf merchandise. Only those from countries that were not directly competing with Canadian teams were carrying their flags, though with far less assurance. Eventually, the crowd looking for blood found none, and isolated fights broke out between Canadians. It's amazing: when you look for self-validation based on vicarious living — feeling an achievement because someone from Canada won — deep down you feel impotent. You need to fight, you need an enemy to keep yourself together, so you can keep a feeling of warmth and belonging.

Police had a hard time keeping order. The crowds were obscenely drunk and no longer said the polite "hellos" that Canadians are accustomed to give. Instead they screamed "Canada" at the top of their voices when they passed each other. Stupid girls offered their eager lips and breasts with the euphoria of "Canada" screams among strangers.

The Olympics had brought out the worst in Canadians. I hope that the normally polite city and traditional lack of nationalism come back with the end of the Olympics.

But really . . . it was a war, and one of the most spineless. A lot of people on the streets were physically out of shape. The more out of shape they were, the more it seemed they were proud of the Canadian athletes. In a statist arena, it was as if people lived vicariously, as so many parents live vicariously through their children.

I watched the opening ceremony of the Vancouver Olympics on a big screen in public in downtown Vancouver. I asked myself, "What motivated me to go there?", as I did on most of the Olympic days. Downtown was filled to the brim with people, and I hate crowds. Teams of athletes entered the arena, each team carrying a piece of cloth hung on a pole. They vigorously waved it, while the audience shouted the name of their particular political entity, feeling proud of it, their chests puffed up. They stood up, and euphoria passed across their faces.

Uninterested in saluting a piece of fluttering cloth with a maple leaf on it, or singing tribal hymns to a political entity, I remained seated. Halfway through, seeing drunken eyes roving over my face, I stood up. For the first time in Canada, I realized I could get beaten up.

Most people on the streets had maple leaves somewhere on their bodies, if not everywhere. Some had maple leaves painted on their faces. Some were wearing shirts with "Canada" written on them. Some had scarves emblazoned with "Go Canada." Fake eyeglasses with red maple leaves on the lens area were the hot-selling symbol of voluntary subjugation of individual sovereignty.

I went out almost every day, to get an intuitive understanding of what Canada will look like when it comes to the crunch. I felt sad about the home I had adopted. But,

alas, I know of no better place on earth. I felt isolated, regretful about not being able to join the catharsis and feeling of belonging; but the outpouring of nationalism was scary.

Most Canadian provinces had their own pavilion. One must ask why you should feel Ontarian or Manitoban, when what you care about is Canada? Manitoba had a huge wooden structure for its pavilion. The wood was supplied from Manitoba. The irony is that Manitoba would have found cheaper wood in Vancouver. But this is the result of the mind-restricting, economics-corrupting, spirit-numbing capacities of tribal worldviews of nationalism and regionalism.

In the end, despite my revulsion against most of what the Olympics of today stand for, I still enjoy watching some of the games, particularly figure skating. It shows the highest that human beings are capable of physically, the grace with which this can be expressed, and the achievements that hard work can produce, a sign that disciplined work can elevate human beings. I respect the devotion that got the contestants where they wanted to go. But they all stand to the anthems, the tribal hymns, of their countries, as if their countrymen had toiled to make their achievements possible.

One day, I hope, at one of the Olympics, conducted on a non-national basis, a medal winner will stand up and say, "This is not my country's achievement, but solely mine. Every day, I woke up at 4 a.m., drank no beer, ate non-tasty food, and toiled. I refuse to salute or wave to a tribal piece of cloth. I refuse to sing hymns to a political boundary that makes no sense to me. But I will salute what human beings are capable of, including the human capacity of standing up for oneself and gracefully accepting the product of one's achievement for oneself."

— Jayant Bhandari

Paradise spurned — I met with a government minister on my last visit to Haiti — I believe he's now their ambassador to the United Nations. As you know, one of my hobbies for the last 30 years has been to go around to these places — hellholes, generally — and try to sell them on a plan to totally reform their country. It would change the place instantaneously from a hellhole into a garden spot — which is entirely possible.

I'd usually meet with the head of state — which is not as hard as you might think — and I'd tell him I could do three things for him. One: I could put him on the cover of every major news magazine in the world in a favorable light, which is the opposite of how he'd usually appear at the time. Two: I could make him legitimately very rich. (It's impossible to get rich the way the likes of Mobutu and Marcos did anymore.) And three: I could set things up so the people would love him, so he wouldn't have to worry about every guy he meets being the one who would pull out a .45 and put a bullet in his head.

The means for achieving these three things was to basically privatize the whole government, 100% of their assets,

issuing shares to the people, and making them owners of their country. With, of course, a whack of cheap founder's stock going to the retiring dictator and his pals to make them go away — what corporate types call a "golden parachute."

Of course, it never went anywhere. Generally speaking, the guy would listen with some interest, but all the guys below him would talk him out of it. Ending corrupt government control of the economy and shifting it to a free market would break their rice bowls. All of these places are kleptocracies. The power of the state is the most effective means man has ever devised for stealing. So, in Haiti, just like in the United States or anywhere else, government doesn't attract the best and the brightest; you get the worst, the most sociopathic. It's absolutely perverse.

— Doug Casey

Union contracts — Under Comrade Obama and his Red Congress, Big Labor has seen its political power and rent-seeking capacity reach astronomical heights. From granting it the act euphemistically known as the Lily Ledbetter Fair Pay Act to handing it GM and Chrysler to trying to exempt it from the new taxes on healthcare benefits that the rest of us would have to pay under Obamacare, Democratic politicians have given Big Labor the time of its life. And it has waged economic jihad against businessmen and taxpayers alike.

But apparently the public has been paying attention, because the favorability rating of unions has been dropping like a stone. According to a Pew Research Center survey performed in February, only about 41% of Americans say they have a favorable view of labor unions, down from 58% in 2007. The percentage of people who have an unfavorable view now exceeds the percentage of those with a favorable one, 42% to 41%.

Naturally, there is great variation by party affiliation. Only 29% of Republicans have a favorable view of unions, compared to 38% of independents and 56% of Democrats. (Maybe that explains why in every election trial lawyers contribute lavishly to Democratic candidates.) The drop is again significant from 2007, when 47% of Republicans had a favorable view, as did 54% of independents and 70% of Democrats.

The Pew Research Center is hardly a right-wing think tank, so union advocates will have trouble pooh-poohing the survey data. In any case, the data are consistent with a Gallup poll of last year, which showed that only 48% of all Americans approved of unions — the lowest percentage since Gallup started surveying pro-union sentiment in 1936.

— Gary Jason

Swap meet — Driving home from work recently, I noticed a new sign by a road on my route. It's one of those small metal signs that from time to time appear in green spaces along the roadside, or in residential lawns when contract work is being done on homes. I don't usually pay much attention to such signs, but this new one caught my eye. For two days, I thought I was reading it incorrectly, or

that I drove past it too quickly and got the letters confused. At the end of the work week, I slowed down when I saw it in the distance to be sure I read it accurately.

I was right! The sign advertises a local tree service, and under the business's name, it reads, "Save Cash! BARTER Save Cash!"

Has it really come to this? Sure, we've all exchanged skills, goods, and services with friends and family members in lieu of cash. But, this is the first time I have ever seen a real business advertising barter. So much for the recovery and "jobs saved." Thanks, Obama.

I actually do need a tree cut down on my property. Usually, felling trees is something we can handle on our own, but this tree is larger and wider than most, and very close to a building. So I'll have to come up with something I can exchange with this local small business. Perhaps, as an attorney, I'll offer to sue Obama on the business owners' behalf for an illegal taking of their livelihood.

— Marla White

Inequality, fraternity — In the same week, both Stephen Colbert, on his show, and John Stossel on his, introduced their brothers — their real-life siblings.

Colbert's younger brother is a very successful corporate attorney who was on the show to answer questions about whether Colbert could use the word "Olympics" when broadcasting from the Vancouver games, even though NBC had paid hundreds of millions of dollars for exclusive use. (Short answer: "No.")

Stossel's older brother is a Harvard physician who argued against former New England Journal of Medicine editor Arnold Relman about the wisdom of imposing barriers between the health industry and physicians in the name of preventing corruption — such as physicians' being induced to prescribe certain drugs by gifts of free pens or dinners. (Short answer: "No.")

Two things struck me.

1. Success runs in families. In each family, siblings become extremely successful, though in two very different industries.

2. The siblings on TV were obviously more handsome than their brothers.

Don't get me wrong. Stephen also seemed much funnier than his brother, and I'm sure that John is more skilled at getting information across in soundbites than his own sibling. But the difference in physical appearance was striking in both cases.

I guess the market is efficient.

— Ted Levy

High-speed flail, cont'd — Even as President Obama attempts to emulate the French by building high-speed rail lines, the French are stepping back and may curtail service as unaffordable. Under European Union rules, EU nations are not allowed to subsidize transportation or other services that would give businesses in those nations undue advantage over businesses in other EU countries.

The EU has given France until July 2010 to more-or-less privatize its rail lines and take them off the govern-

ment dole. The French national railway, SNCF, says that 80% of its high-speed trains cover their operating costs, but it racked up a \$38 billion debt building those lines. In 1997, the French government gave the tracks and the debt to a second company, RFF, which charges SNCF to operate trains on its tracks.

To repay the debt, RFF plans to increase its fees to the point where almost no trains will cover their costs. This means that SNCF will be forced to raise fares or eliminate trains or both. Anyway, the number of people riding French high-speed trains is likely to be far lower next year than it was last year, when the average resident of France rode them a mere 400 miles.

Meanwhile, the United States recently announced \$8 billion worth of high-speed rail grants to 31 states. Most of these grants represent only a tiny down payment on the cost of providing high-speed rail in those states. One exception is a \$773 million grant for 79-mph rail service between Milwaukee and Madison. Based on state of Wisconsin estimates, this train will require subsidies of \$130 or more for every rider. Maybe the way for us to put a stop to such ridiculous projects is for the United States to join the EU.

— Randal O'Toole

Daddy needs a new policy — President Obama visited Las Vegas last month. While he claimed to be campaigning for Harry Reid, I suspect his true purpose was to scout a craps table or two in the hope of finding a new economic advisor.

— Tim Slagle

Après ils, le deluge — As the desperate financial plight of many state and local governments comes increasingly into view, expect many of those august bodies to become ever more petty and audacious in their hunt for any and all sources of revenue — whatever it takes to forestall the inevitable declaration of bankruptcy.

First, an example of the petty: Los Angeles is sending round canvassers to get a count of unregistered dogs. City council president Eric Garcetti estimates that, if perhaps two-thirds of the city's dogs are unregistered at present, that payment of the registration fees would bring in about \$3.6 million. But even before removing the costs of the extra paperwork and the salaries of the canvassers, this is a paltry sum for a city that is at least \$200 million in the hole for this year alone, and which projects a \$400 million deficit in 2011.

On to the audacious: Chicago is only one of many cities shortening yellow lights on traffic cycles, so that their red-light cameras might capture more offenders. City officials seem to regard this as printing money, but the move comes at a very real human cost: a Texas A&M study indicates that adding a second of yellow-light time leads to a 35–40% decrease in crashes, and a 60% decrease in citations. Taking that second away means more damage, more injuries, and more deaths.

Seriously dealing with these budget shortfalls would involve taking on public unions and entitlement programs. But that takes courage, and a willingness to be voted out

of a cushy government chair. So instead legislators will continue nickel-and-dime the citizenry, and endangering the public welfare, in order to buy themselves a little longer in the halls of power.

— Andrew Ferguson

Company man — Obama has delighted in bashing filthy capitalist pig CEOs for taking huge salaries and bonuses. He loves to lambaste “fat cats” on Wall Street, even appointing a pay czar to make sure that companies that took TARP funds didn't pay their executives “excessive” bonuses.

But regarding the industries he has socialized, he is nothing short of lavish toward executives. Take GM, now rightly nicknamed “Government Motors,” since it is co-owned by the federal government and the UAW. GM has sucked up massive amounts of taxpayer dollars, but that fact hasn't stopped the management from getting big paychecks. For example, the CEO, Ed Whitacre, is receiving a salary of \$1.7 million, with stock bonuses that will bring the total payout to \$9 million.

And he isn't the only one. GM is rehiring former CEO Fritz Henderson as a “consultant.” He will work 20 hours a month for a tidy \$59 thousand a month. Not that he needs much help — when he replaced CEO Rick Wagoner (who was fired by Obama), Henderson was paid \$5.5 million in total compensation for the year.

GM's new CFO, Chris Liddell, is going to get \$750,000 a year in salary, and stock bonuses that will likely be worth \$5.45 million. Board member and “special adviser” Stephen Girsky is going to get \$1.1 million yearly in salary and stock.

All these compensation packages are okay with Populist Obama and his pay czar Kenneth Feinberg. No, no populist rhetoric and pay caps for socialized companies!

— Gary Jason

Senseless in Seattle — On February 12, Judge Catherine Shaffer of King County Superior Court threw out Seattle's ban on carrying a gun at a city park, golf course, community center, beach, or pool.

The gun ban was proclaimed on October 14, 2009, by the Parks superintendent, Timothy Gallagher. He said he was doing it to protect children — an argument that went over fairly well in a city that votes 85% Democrat.

The State of Washington's Republican attorney general, Rob McKenna, said that Washington's law created a statewide right to carry a gun, and that behind the statute was the state's 1889 constitution, which guarantees “the right of the individual citizen to bear arms in defense of himself.”

Seattle's lame-duck mayor, Greg Nickels, didn't care about that. He backed his parks superintendent, arguing that the city had the right to set the rules for its own property.

Across Lake Washington, in the less liberal suburb of Bellevue, is the Second Amendment Foundation, run by Alan Gottlieb. Seattle liberals hate Gottlieb, because he does things like file lawsuits in favor of gun rights —

which in this case he had threatened to do and immediately did. His lawsuit listed as plaintiffs Winnie Chan, 36, a state parole officer who said she needed protection from criminals who knew her; and Ray Carter, 44, founder of the Seattle Chapter of Pink Pistols/Cease Fear, who said he feared a hate crime because he is openly gay. These were just the sort of plaintiffs you'd want for King County Superior Court, which tends strongly to judicial liberalism. In any event, the law on guns was what the Republican attorney general said it was, and so Seattle's antigun rule went down.

Six days later, Parks Superintendent Gallagher made another effort to protect citizens from imminent danger. He announced a new rule: tobacco smoking would be banned in all Seattle parks as "a health measure to protect people from secondhand smoke" and to set a good example to children. The ban covered chewing tobacco as well. It did not cover marijuana use, a crime for which the Seattle city attorney no longer prosecutes.

There was an outcry against the no-smoking rule, with citizens posting objections on the web page of the Seattle Times. That evening the city announced the ban was modified. People could continue to ingest their nicotine in parks as long as they were 25 feet away from other people. Said Gallagher: "Based on the input from the public that followed my initial decision, I have decided that a gradual approach to a smoking ban is reasonable."

The Parks Department also considered a ban on spitting in the park — the kind of ban traditionally advocated by public health officials as part of the effort to prevent contagious diseases — but department officials decided against it. They did not want people accusing them of creating a nanny state.

— Bruce Ramsey

Keep the checks coming — In early March, Sen. Jim Bunning (R-KY), who is not running for reelection, singlehandedly (by means of a one-man filibuster) stopped an automatic extension of unemployment benefits . . . for all of a day.

Unemployment benefits have been extended several times over the past two years, as unemployment went to and remained at more than 10%. And no politician is either smart enough or honest enough to note the obvious connection between these two phenomena (when you make not working less onerous, fewer people work).

Bunning, not known as one of the Senate's brighter lights (a very low bar indeed), tried to make a point about principle, which is never a wise move in the Senate. He seemed to believe that benefits should not be extended ad infinitum without any effort to pay for them. After being made a laughingstock in the mainstream media, and being called immoral by that great ethicist Bernie Sanders (S-VT), Bunning acquiesced to a compromise: the Senate would *vote* on whether the unemployment benefit extension should be paid for or added to the deficit.

I think that Bunning, and the Republicans, made the wrong move. They should have tried to outdo the

Democrats. Noting that unemployment benefits have been extended many times in the past year, and that high levels of unemployment are anticipated for several more years, and given the great need to care for people without a job, unemployment benefits should be made *permanent*. I, for one, would love to hear the Democrats explain why benefits should be extended repeatedly and indefinitely, yet *not* made permanent.

— Ted Levy

Vengeful spirit — The generally accepted definition of terrorism is that it's the use of violence to create fear in a society in order to induce political change. I don't think that's the case with the man who flew his plane into the IRS building. This was just an angry man, acting as an individual, attacking those he saw as destroying his life. The fact of the matter is that it was an act of revenge, not terror.

But according to the FBI, terrorism is the unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property, meant to intimidate or coerce a government or the civilian population as a means for achieving political or social goals. It's to their advantage to see this as an act of domestic terrorism. It makes their jobs seem important and will result in more personnel to fill their gigantic new Homeland Security complex in DC, and more funding to look into Americans' comings, goings, and thoughts.

Joseph Stack's call to violence seemed like an afterthought to me. In reality he's just calling for the righting of egregious wrongs. However, it's getting to the point in the United States that you have to be careful about even complaining, or you might be put on some kind of watch list. You actually better be careful about what you say, and how, and to whom. The walls have ears, as the Soviets, among others, used to say.

The media has downplayed his letter as a "rant" or a "screed" penned by a lunatic, partially to be self-righteous and partially to discourage others from reading it and thinking about it. But it's actually worth reading and thinking about. It's not that often you get to read a suicide note written by what appeared to be quite an intelligent guy. His letter is a little disjointed, agitated, and a bit ungrammatical at times — after all, it is a suicide note — but it's not at all irrational. And I suspect he put his finger on what is probably going on in the minds of a fair percentage of the population.

You know the old saw people once used, but don't anymore, as it's become politically incorrect? Three guys are doing the same thing, and one says, "I'm a freedom fighter. You're a rebel. He's a terrorist." So, bandying these terms around makes conversation difficult. The FBI's definition is self-serving and, in this case, serves — perhaps not accidentally — to obscure the truth of the matter.

— Doug Casey

Another global goof — The theory of anthropogenic global warming hasn't had a great year. First came the "hacking" of emails from the Climate Research Unit at East Anglia University — one of the major centers for

AGW research — and the posting of those embarrassing messages on a publicly accessible site. This act of whistle-blowing hurt the theory's credibility. The emails showed, at a minimum, collusion among researchers to make it hard for skeptics to question the AGW theory.

Next came the explosion of the Himalayan glacier story — the frightening prediction that the Himalayan glaciers (a crucial source of water for many millions of people) would be gone by the year 2035. This forecast had been a prominent part of the 2007 report that helped to win the Nobel Peace Prize for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). The glacier prediction collapsed when it was revealed that it was based on a misquotation of a lone Indian researcher during an interview in 1999.

Yet another shoe has dropped. Last year, a scientific team headed by Mark Siddall published an influential study in the prestigious journal *Nature Geoscience* that appeared to confirm the 2007 IPCC report. That report had predicted that the ocean level would likely rise 18–59 cm. by the year 2100. Siddall and his collaborators used a large data set (stretching over 22,000 years) to come up with an estimate of a probable rise in sea levels between 7 cm. and 82 cm. But Siddall has now formally retracted his paper, after other scientists pointed out two major flaws. One was a mathematical miscalculation; the other was a failure to take full account of temperature changes over the past 2,000 years.

Siddall has pooh-poohed the significance of the retraction, cheekily saying, "Retraction is a regular part of the publication process. Science is a complicated game and there are set procedures in place that act as checks and balances." But this is just silly — retractions of scientific articles are rare. Indeed, Siddall's retraction is the only one in the three-year history of *Nature Geoscience*. — Gary Jason

Mendacious moral outrage — Following the advice of Sun Tzu, I try to understand my adversaries. This effort leads me to join some email lists and read some magazines that aren't in my native comfort zone. One of the mailing lists is a west coast regional division of MoveOn.org.

As you may have read or heard elsewhere, MoveOn.org has gotten behind — in a big way — Arkansas Lieutenant Governor Bill Halter's bid to unseat fellow Democrat Blanche Lincoln in her campaign for reelection to the U.S. Senate. Halter is attacking Lincoln from the Left, and that agrees well with MoveOn.org's statist agenda.

By most accounts, Halter is a popular fellow in his home state and a reasonable candidate for higher office. He sees Lincoln's waffling on the issue of healthcare reform as a tactical vulnerability. And he may well be right; Arkansas' voters have shown before a hearty appetite for the milk of the Nanny State's teat.

For its part, MoveOn.org is frustrated with politicians it has supported but now finds insufficiently statist. (The main offender here, though the group won't admit it, is the president. MoveOn.org prefers to focus its annoyance

on smaller fry.)

Most of this has been reported; you don't have to sift through MoveOn.org's emails to know it. But that sifting does offer some insights. The one that seems most useful to me is the moralizing tone that its financial appeals take. Here's a bit from the first solicitation on behalf of Halter:

For the past year, a small handful of conservative Democrats in Congress has obstructed progress at every turn — but starting today, we've got a huge opportunity to stop one of the worst of them. That's because just this morning Arkansas Lieutenant Governor Bill Halter announced that he's challenging Senator Blanche Lincoln in the Democratic primary there. . . . Sen. Lincoln stood with insurance companies to kill the public option, with coal companies to roll back the Clean Air Act, and with big banks to kill legislation that would have helped families stay in their homes. . . . Just how bad is Blanche Lincoln? She promised to filibuster any health care bill that included a public option after taking more than \$866,000 from insurance and HMO interests. She's the #1 recipient of campaign contributions from Big Oil in the last year, and now she's sponsoring a bill to roll back the Clean Air Act. And she accepted more than \$1.3 million over her career from Wall Street banks and financial interests, and then voted to kill legislation that would've allowed struggling homeowners to renegotiate their mortgages and stay in their homes. . . . Here's how MoveOn member Jennifer P. from Little Rock put it: "Lincoln never met a special interest she didn't like. It's hard to express just how awful she has been as a senator. I don't know of anyone who will vote for her if she shows up on the November ballot."

Of course, the piece is selective to the point of mendacity about Lincoln's voting record. That's to be expected from this kind of marketing effort. What's surprising (to me) is that moralizing rhetoric: "bad," "kill," "awful," etc. This, from an organization born from the premise that politics should avoid moral indignation. (For the neophytes among us, the "move on" of MoveOn.org came from the argument that Bill Clinton's marital infidelities and other immoral behaviors were trivial and that the country's attentions should move on to more substantive matters.)

The solipsism of the email's "regular person" endorsement illustrates MoveOn.org's navel-gazing appeal. No one *she knows* will vote for Lincoln. Given the cautious form of her ID, perhaps this means the Little Rock chapters of Alcoholics Anonymous will vote Republican come November. Who cares?

At one point, some years ago, MoveOn.org looked like a potent political force. Its latest work seems less so.

— Jim Walsh

The real cost of regulation — Last month I watched an episode of the great Fox Business Network show "Stossel," devoted to the idea that increasing government power is pushing us down "the road to serfdom."

At one point near the show's end, Stossel used a Reason TV story involving Drew Carey, who told of a hardworking Hispanic-American woman running her own business selling bacon dogs from a portable stand on the streets of Los Angeles. Doing so is illegal because local regulators demand that such items be prepared only in upscale stands costing \$27,000, with multiple sinks to allow prepa-

ration of the bacon separate from other items. They claim this is for public safety, even though this woman had been selling bacon dogs for decades without ever having a customer get sick or complain. She spent over ten thousand dollars defending herself, was in jail for several months, lost her customers because her business was temporarily closed down and then because she couldn't sell the bacon dogs her customers wanted. The audience laughed as Stossel told the story.

He understood why they were laughing: it's a minor example of regulation, one of thousands he could have regaled us with. Arrested for selling bacon dogs . . . so absurd it's laughable, right?

Stossel made his apologies for the live audience to the viewers at home. But I am not mollified. Had I been Stossel, I would have turned to the audience and asked, "Why are you laughing? A poor woman who got up every day to serve her customers, working 12-hour days to make a meager income, had her liberty taken away — was thrown in jail for several months. She had her business taken from her, her savings destroyed — and you're laughing? What you should be doing is stopping every time you see the local bureaucrats who are responsible for this sort of atrocity, pointing to them, and saying, "You are despicable. You are ruining people's lives. You ought to be ashamed of yourselves."

Of course I am not Stossel, and I am aware that he knows much better than I how to produce a television show. But if his goal, as it seems to be, is to highlight libertarian principles, he should be aware that those principles will not reanimate the American public while people still feel safe laughing about the government's destroying lives. The people who founded this country pledged their lives, fortunes, and sacred honor. And they weren't laughing.

— Ted Levy

Jumping ship — I've had a rude awakening over the past two days. First, I heard an interview of Diane Ravitch (by John Miller of National Review Online). Ravitch is an education professor at New York University and a former education department assistant secretary who for years was a spokesman for school reform. Yesterday, she said that she has changed her mind about school choice.

She doesn't like charter schools because they "skim the cream" of the top students in low-income communities, and she doesn't like vouchers because they are too small to do much good and they endanger the public school system. Yes, the public school system needs reform, but she thinks the thing to do is to seek out the "best possible leadership" and go from there.

Still reeling from that interview, with its capacious illogic, I heard a lecture by David Frum, conservative writer and blogger. His lecture, "A Modern Conservatism," repudiated most of the Republican Party, from populists to libertarians.

Frum dismissed Ron Paul as a fringe figure. (I think he called his ideas crazy.) He praised the bank rescues as the

salvation of our country, fervently wishing that Herbert Hoover had done the same. He disparaged tax cuts as an outmoded nostrum, said we must slow healthcare costs through a system in which the government regulates (but, of course, doesn't *sell*) insurance, encouraged a consumption tax and a carbon tax, and even said that we have to do something about shortening families' daily commutes. Oh, and he praised the election in Iraq (not mentioning the 38 people killed).

I vaguely remember a David Frum who wrote a book called "Dead Right" in which he said that you can't be a party of principle if you dole out subsidies that eliminate personal responsibility. Or was that some other David Frum?

Here we have a chance for the free market to make a comeback, and its old friends are jumping ship.

— Jane S. Shaw

Labor pains — The stunning election of Scott Brown to Teddy Kennedy's old Senate seat has already had one salutary effect. I refer to the quashing of Craig Becker's nomination to the National Labor Relations Board.

Even among the ultra-leftists Obama has nominated to various positions, this one appointment reeked of extremism. The National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) is supposed to be a neutral arbiter in disputes between organized labor and businesses. But in a naked attempt at regulatory capture, Obama nominated to the open seat on the NLRB Mr. Becker, a lawyer last employed by the Service Employees International Union and the AFL-CIO.

Becker has quite a history of ultra-pro-labor sympathies. In one of his law journal articles, he argued that "employers should be stripped of any legally cognizable interest in their employees' election of representatives." In another article, he urged that the NLRB has the power, simply and at will, to rewrite the rules governing union elections, so as to favor labor. This would presumably include the power to institute card check rules, rules allowing a union to win certification if it can get a majority of workers to sign up publicly, instead of requiring a secret ballot. Quite a neutral guy.

In a surprise vote, two Democrats (blue dogs, scared by Brown's win) voted with all the Republicans to block a cloture vote on the nomination. That effectively killed it, since the Democrats had lost their filibuster-proof majority.

Obama may use a "recess appointment" to get Becker in, but such a move will cost him political support, a commodity becoming scarcer for him by the day. — Gary Jason

Unleashing the hounds — Recently, Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood announced that future federal transit grants would focus on "livability." Beneath the rhetoric is LaHood's decision to eliminate the only efforts anyone ever made to make sure transit money isn't wasted on urban monuments that contribute little to transportation.

Back in 2005, then-Secretary Mary Peters stunned the transit world by adopting a "cost-effectiveness rule" deny-

ing funding to any transit projects that did not meet a very minimal definition of cost effectiveness. Particularly wasteful projects such as the extension of BART to San Jose (estimated to cost \$100 for every new transit trip it will carry) and Portland's commuter-rail line (which costs enough to give each commuter who uses it a free Toyota Prius every year for life) were eliminated by the rule (though these two were exempted by local congressional delegations).

In 2007, Peters took another step and required that any applications for federal funds for streetcars prove that they would be more cost-effective than buses. Up to 80 cities had planned to apply for such funds, and all but one immediately gave up, knowing that buses were far less costly.

LaHood's announcement rescinded both these rules. Soon after, the Federal Transit Administration announced funding for streetcars in Dallas, New Orleans, and Tucson, as well as an inane light-rail line in Detroit. In effect, LaHood has said he doesn't care how much federal money cities waste on rail transit. All that counts is image — and streetcars and other forms of rail transit supposedly create a much better image than buses.

— Randal O'Toole

Executive compensation — With all the recent animosity against CEOs making multimillion dollar salaries, you would think that CEOs are all outrageously overpaid. I think this is because most people don't know what a CEO does, or realize that being a CEO takes special talents which only a few people possess. If everyone could do the job, there wouldn't be such a high premium paid for the skills involved.

When it's professional sports or entertainment, people rarely question multimillion dollar salaries and bonuses. (Perhaps that's because in a sense, we're all failed baseball players and movie stars, and we recognize the preciousness of those talents.) Are there some CEOs that don't deserve their salaries? Perhaps. But I never found Conan O'Brien terribly funny, and he just walked away from NBC with a \$41 million golden parachute after sinking the Tonight Show into the ratings coal mine.

CEOs are anonymous. Rather than being the center of attention in a motion picture or the guy who drove in the winning run, they are the geniuses behind a delicious hamburger, a sleek automobile, or a profitable investment portfolio. Conveniences like drive-through ATMs and washing machines are such a quiet portion of our everyday lives that we never take the time to consider how they got here.

Meanwhile, the CEOs, the stars of our modern American life, never get the applause they truly deserve. The least we can do is let them enjoy their compensation in peace.

— Tim Slagle

The problem of risk — I confess to receiving Social Security and Medicare and being a plausible candidate for a "death squad." I might make excuses for myself, but why bother? Even a scoundrel's ideas may be worth something.

What should be done about people with expensive "preexisting conditions"? Should the government decree that health-insurance companies stop "discriminating" against them?

A mandate to insure all applicants impartially would run counter to the very idea of insurance, which is to spread individually unpredictable risk over many participants in the form of insurance premiums. An insure-all mandate would transfer wealth to a company's most costly applicants, who would have a much stronger incentive to buy policies than healthy persons. A mandate could hardly be applied only to some insurance companies, because they would be inundated by sick applicants, to the benefit of insurers escaping the mandate.

Mitigating this "adverse selection" would require insuring all members of large groups, such as all employees of large companies. (But employer-linked insurance, a legacy of World War II wage controls, has disadvantages of its own.) Anyway, requiring mass participation in insurance would mean coercion.

The problem of preexisting conditions may have been less urgent in the past, when inter- and intragenerational solidarity in large families was stronger than nowadays and when fewer high-tech medical treatments were available. The problem is particularly dramatic in families with physically or mentally handicapped children who will require expensive treatment and care for their entire lives. Intuitively, it seems unfair that these children and their parents should have to suffer the capricious blows of fate without being able to insure against even the monetary costs of those blows. Yet requiring private insurance companies to bear those costs would presuppose oppressive regulation or government subsidies. A drift toward government-monopolized health insurance then seems almost inevitable.

Arguably, were it not for constitutional restrictions, the federal government has a moral duty to provide the otherwise missing solidarity of nationwide risk-sharing. Libertarians, agreeing with John F. Kennedy that life is unfair, might reply that government has no business trying to straighten out the unfairnesses of life. But they should then be ready to deal with the reactions that this reply is sure to draw.

Who knows what solutions private enterprise might have devised if decades of government regulation had not forestalled them? But regrets about the past are no answer to today's dilemma. Not knowing, or not yet knowing, the solution to a problem should not bar recognizing it.

— Leland B. Yeager

Disintegration — I think it was inevitable, from a number of points of view, that the euro would sooner or later burst apart at the seams. The Greek crisis isn't the first straw in the wind by any means, but it's a major, unmistakable sign that the EU currency union is going to break up and the euro is on its way out. And the EU itself will meet its inevitable doom not too long after that.

When you stop to think about it, the EU was really a stupid idea to begin with. It started out as a coal and steel free-trade zone, which made a lot of sense. But as time went on, as people in general and Europeans in particular seem to love to do, they bureaucratized the thing and made it into a pseudo-government. They wrote a constitution hundreds of times longer than the one that served the United States so well until it was abandoned. They took on micromanaging everything, down to producing huge, phonebook-sized regulations on the composition of French cheeses, and so on. There's a burgeoning bureaucracy in Belgium trying to consolidate the 27 member states into one giant country, and it's absolutely not going to work.

The people in question don't just come from different countries that speak different languages — they come from different cultures. That's far more profound a difference and one that, historically, takes centuries to harmonize — if even then. From an economic perspective, it's important to understand that these different cultures have different economic patterns. They just don't do things the same way. People in some cultures don't save, for example; they'd rather borrow and spend. Other cultures don't get the concept of sustaining capital at all, and the things they build start running down immediately. Swedes think, act, work, play, and live quite differently from Sicilians.

— Doug Casey

Mission accomplished — Wow! It is finally official: we won the war in Iraq!

No less an expert than the esteemed vice president of

the United States has told the good news to the American public. On the Larry King show (Feb. 10), Joe Biden said he is “very optimistic” about the survivability of the democratic government now in place.

And who is to get the credit for this victory — for turning a tribalist totalitarian dictatorship into a reasonable facsimile of a modern multicultural democratic state? Why, Obama, of course. Obama won the war — with the able guidance and support of (ahem!) Mr. Biden himself.

Biden crowed, “I mean, this could be one of the greatest achievements of this administration. You're going to see 90,000 American troops come marching home by the end of summer. You're going to see a stable government in Iraq that is actually moving toward a representative government.” He added archly, “I've been there 17 times now. . . . I know every one of the major players in all segments of that society.”

Now, this is insufferably rich. Biden was one of the pack of flip-flopping hypocritical hounds who first voted to go to war in Iraq, then later opposed that course, calling for an international summit of Middle Eastern nations, under some fuzzy theory that they would take over and allow us to pull out. Still later (in his abortive run for the presidency), he called for splitting Iraq into three rump nations.

Biden's master, Obama, deserves a little credit. He opposed the surge and exulted on his website (until July of 2008) that it was failing. But that won't prevent him from claiming the credit.

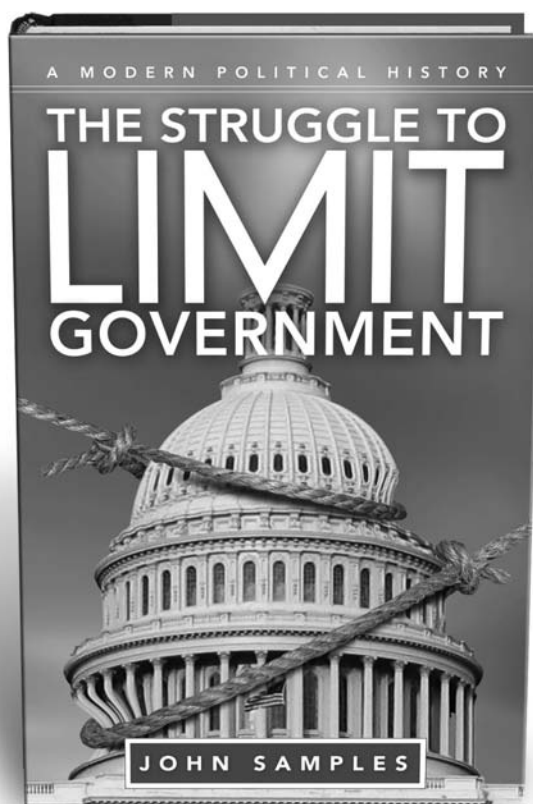
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Will Obama perhaps award himself the Medal of Honor? No, surely that honor must go to Biden, for turning up in Iraq those 17 times.

— Gary Jason

Gunned down — There has been considerable discussion in print, by radio commentators, and on cable television news programs about the recently argued case *McDonald v. Chicago*. A Chicago resident wanted to have a handgun for self-defense in his own home but was prevented from doing so by city laws prohibiting such ownership. He asked the Supreme Court to strike down the prohibition.

Such laws or regulations typically originate in this way: a city experiences a spate of crimes involving guns — some deadly, some not. City officials hold meetings to talk to residents about the unacceptable level of gun violence. People attending the meeting plead with, or yell at, city officials to do something to stop the violence, to make the streets safe, to get the guns off the streets, to keep children from being killed. Officials agree that gun crime is unacceptable and promise they'll do something to stop the violence. Intensely restrictive legislation (sometimes an outright ban, such as in Chicago) regarding gun ownership, carrying, and possession is passed. But crime continues, or escalates. No one is safer. The process is repeated. Residents are without recourse or right to protect themselves.

In begging city government to “do something” about their security, urban citizens end up ceding a natural right that even a most unlibertarian philosopher would never cede.

In “Leviathan,” Thomas Hobbes wrote that man’s most fundamental right is to use his own power, as he wills, to preserve himself. Individuals cede all their rights to the Leviathan, the commonwealth, except the right of self-preservation. “A covenant not to defend myself from force, by force, is always void.” After witnessing the English Civil War, Hobbes wrote of a way to secure a society from civil unrest. But as much as he may have desired security, he would not cede the right of self-preservation, as so many of our cities’ residents seem willing to do.

I don’t know whether Mr. McDonald has read Hobbes. I doubt that Hobbes’ work would be found in any Chicago public school curriculum. But by most accounts McDonald is living pretty close to the state of nature, wherein life for most men is “solitary, poore, nasty, brutish and short” — especially for the gang members against whom he is trying to protect himself. McDonald simply wants city government to respect his exercise of his natural right of self-preservation. The current “covenant” preventing him from doing so is void. He should have his gun.

— Marlane White

Time unripe — Libertarians were cheered when Ron Paul won the presidential straw poll at the Conservative Political Action Conference in February. But Paul started his speech to the conference with three unsalable proposals: end the Federal Reserve, end the federal income

tax, and withdraw from the United Nations. Any one of these would prevent him from being nominated, let alone elected.

Paul is a candidate of radical ideas, some libertarian and some hard-right conservative. If your aim is to promote those ideas, Paul is the irreplaceable man. And that’s fine. Think of him as a long-term investment. But he is not a man who can be elected president.

Consider the three positions above. There are arguments for them, but all are inside-the-church arguments. Theoretical arguments. They may be ripe at some other time and place, but not now.

Take, for instance, gold-backed money, which is the real point of ending the Federal Reserve. There is a theoretical argument for it. It also has an aesthetic and emotional appeal. But for 75 years gold has not been a circulating medium anywhere in the world. Leaders of banking and finance, who were once the gold standard’s core supporters, no longer believe in it. To bring it back requires that they be convinced that it would be better for modern commerce than a system of floating fiat currencies. It’s a thing I’m not convinced of, myself, but that is not my point here. Gold standard advocates have to change the minds of financial leaders — and they have not done it.

A serious candidate for national office has to pick fruit already ripe. For example, George W. Bush supported the idea of private accounts in Social Security. It wasn’t what got him elected in 2000, but he was for it, and it seemed like an idea that might be ripe. Twenty years of intellectual watering and pruning had been done for that idea, including the work of the Cato Institute. It had gotten support from a commission appointed by President Clinton. The predicted funding shortfall created a problem that private accounts were supposed to solve. There was also a powerful case that money invested over a lifetime, rather than passed immediately from one pocket to another, offered a far more comfortable retirement for the average investor. Still, there was no sale. The Democrats stressed the risk to the below-average investor, which was true, and branded the idea a Wall Street plot, which was not. They turned people against it, and so thoroughly that Republicans are still being accused of wanting to take away people’s Social Security.

Gold money is an even more radical proposal than Social Security private accounts, and the political spadework has not been done for it. As an idea, it is not ripe. If the United States goes to 20% inflation, that may change. Not now.

One idea that may be ripe, and that Paul championed during his CPAC speech, is a less interventionist, more America-first foreign policy. This is distinctly a minority view among Republicans, but Americans generally are ready for it. If Paul can get a large number of Republicans to think of war as another power-wielding, life-and-wealth-destroying program rather than *hoo-ah* and support-our-troops, he will have done a lot.

I love him for standing up to the neocons. But for

national office, libertarians need a candidate with positions that immediately make sense to people less ideological than they are. That might be a candidate for a strong dollar without specifying a gold dollar; for cutting spending rather than proposing to cancel the federal income tax at the time of trillion-dollar deficits; and for a foreign policy of minding America's business without needing to ditch the UN. The UN doesn't have any power. Why worry about it?

That is why in last month's issue of *Liberty* I did the interview with former Governor Gary Johnson of New Mexico. I am not sure he is the man to win the presidency. But one could imagine, if the stars lined up just right, someone with his ideas winning it. — Bruce Ramsey

Space out — The space shuttle has now made its last flight, even though a replacement vehicle has not been built. Much like a 24-hour Amtrak layover, the government doesn't see a reason to provide alternative transportation in the interim. Although I highly approve of the government trying to inspire private space vehicles, I wonder about the current wisdom of placing U.S. astronauts aboard failure-prone Russian Soyuz rockets until then. To me, that seems about as safe as driving a Yugo in a NASCAR race. — Tim Slagle

How not to fix a recession — Mass unemployment and long-term unemployment are tragedies. From all sides we hear the cry for "jobs, jobs, jobs." Recovery from a business recession does create jobs. More importantly, it restores lost production of the necessities and pleasures of life, for which work is a regrettably necessary means rather than an objective in itself.

Before endorsing artificial creation of specific jobs and other ad hoc "stimulus" measures, we should understand what a recession is — a disruption of economic coordination. Frederic Bastiat, Henry George, and Wilhelm Röpke, among others, wondered in almost poetic language at the spontaneous, market-driven, coordination of local and national economies and of the world economy. Contacts are established among business firms and between firms, workers, and consumers. A pattern of production and prices is established and continuously adapted that takes account remarkably well of resources, technological possibilities, and the wants of people as workers, consumers, employers, and investors. Things hang sensibly together, and with no central planning and direction.

Occasionally, though, this marvelous meshing of millions and billions of individual plans goes awry. A standard example has to do with unemployed workers who would gladly buy more products if only they could earn incomes to pay for them, and of employers who would gladly hire more workers if only they could find customers for their products.

The defect in such a case is not — not fundamentally — insufficient aggregate demand; it is not too little spending to buy the output of a fully employed economy. Fundamentally, supply creates demand: people specialize

in producing particular goods and services to trade them away, sooner or later, for the specialized products of other people. These transactions do not take place by barter, however; instead, money and credit must lubricate them. Sometimes these lubricants fail.

Recessions typically result from too-tight monetary policy. Disruptions of credit in particular, rather by exception, have caused our current woes. There is plenty of blame to share, as by financiers who scarcely understood their newfangled issues of securities based on other securities based ultimately on shaky mortgages, as well as insurance issued against default on debts. The financiers were responding, moreover, to faulty incentive structures. These errors, although not excused by a background of misguided government interventions, did occur against that background. Policies of artificially easy money and credit and of promoting homeownership even by financially unqualified buyers fed a speculative housing boom that was bound to collapse. The collapse brought a chain reaction of bankruptcies, loss of confidence, contagious panic, and hesitation to grant credit and spend money.

Ad hoc remedies might do some good in the short run. Exaggerating for dramatic effect rather than making a serious proposal, Keynes even imagined that hiring workers to dig and refill holes in the ground might not be the worst policy. Far better, however, is to facilitate firms', workers', and consumers' groping their way back to market-clearing prices and to restoring or replacing business contacts, as they have often done before. An adequate money supply — certainly not lacking nowadays — would ease this process of restoring coordination.

Ad hoc and unpredictable interventions, however, are an obstacle to recovery, as in the 1930s. Plagued by uncertainty and even by fear, banks and other lenders hang onto their money, as do business firms and consumers. Potential investors hold back from projects, and potential employers wait to see what happens before restoring their payrolls. Will the Federal Reserve be able to reverse its massive emergency expansion of its balance sheet, possibly at the cost of renewed recession? Or will the activation of idle bank reserves and cash balances cause severe inflation? How will the government deal with its swollen deficit and debts? Will it partially repudiate its bonds and entitlement promises, perhaps openly but more probably by inflation? Will the Chinese and Japanese lose confidence in U.S. bonds, fleeing from the dollar and triggering its collapse? Will new taxes somehow save the budgetary situation, and if so, what sort of taxes? Will the so-called Bush tax cuts be allowed to expire, or will some of them be extended or replaced? Will the tax code keep on getting more complicated and hard to comply with? What sort of healthcare reform will be imposed, and at what cost to employers?

Stimulus programs of the recent sort hardly inspire confidence, with their invitation to pork barrel projects, their misallocation of resources, and their outright destruction of wealth (as by "cash for clunkers"). Switching to

“green” energy, often recommended for creating more jobs than reliance on traditional energy, also means waste; for it would reduce the productivity of labor in energy production.

Imagine: seeking prosperity by destroying wealth! Have politicians forgotten Bastiat’s refutation of the broken-window fallacy? Given politicians’ short-run orientation, capriciousness, and apparent contempt for the very fundamentals of economics, it is no wonder that businesspeople would rather keep their options open than show the spirit of enterprise.

Concern with the psychological aspects of business cycles – contagious over-optimism, contagious fear, and herd behavior – is becoming more and more respectable among academic economists, even though it lends itself less readily to elegant formalization than what has so far occupied theorists. Bruce Yandle’s “Lost Trust: The Real Cause of the Financial Meltdown” (Independent Review, Winter 2010) and George Akerlof and Robert Shiller’s “Animal Spirits” (Princeton University Press, 2009) are examples of this increased respectability.

“Jobs, jobs, jobs” – or rather, their results in the form of desired goods and services (as well as workers’ pride in productive activity) – are a worthy objective; but ad hoc measures that increase uncertainty, undermine confidence, and perpetuate fear are no way to achieve that objective.

— Leland B. Yeager

Congressional scam — When an event renders you speechless, I suppose that writing is the only way to express thoughts about it. Just such an event has happened.

Rep. Barney Frank (D-MA) stunned the investment world recently when he issued a warning about the risk of the debt of Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae. As reported by the Washington Post (March 6), he said that investing in these companies—meaning, presumably, either lending them money or buying any of the massive amounts of paper they now own — should not be considered as safe as investing in the federal government. In his words, “People who own Fannie and Freddie debt are not in the same legal position as [those who own] Treasury bonds, and I don’t want them to be.”

In case anybody misunderstood what he was getting at, he added that these failed government-sponsored entities (GSEs) should be restructured in such a way as to “preserve the right to give people haircuts.” In other words, the feds should just rip off the victims who invested in these scam companies. Or at least (as he clarified later) the government shouldn’t guarantee any of the paper those scams issued before the government seized them.

Now, there are two big reasons why this announcement is so amazing.

First, it is directly contrary to what Obama dictated when (last Christmas Eve) he unilaterally chose to remove the cap on the federal government’s liability for Freddie and Fannie. That implicitly promised investors that the fed-

eral government was backing the whole crap sandwich.

And indeed, Frank’s statement prodded the Treasury Department to issue an immediate statement, explicitly committing the federal government to backing those companies.

Second, Frank is the number one villain in the whole Freddie-Fannie scam. This vile reptile fought Bush and others bitterly every time they suggested that those companies be reined in. He used the companies as tools to give people “affordable housing”; that is, he used the money sucked into those companies from private investors to buy votes by letting the GSEs back risky loans. The money was invested only because Freddie and Fannie were government sponsored, with what was called an “implied” backing. Frank got the votes, and now he wants to give the original investors the shaft.

— Gary Jason

Snowblind — Just a few years ago, alarmists, including politicians such as Sen. Barbara Boxer and journalists such as Thomas Friedman, were telling us that lack of winter snowfall was an indicator of global warming.

Now alarmists have changed their tune, telling us that record snowfalls are a sign of climate change. They seem to recognize how ridiculous it sounds to be claiming large snowfalls as a sign of global warming, given their recent pronouncements about slight snowfalls being an indicator of the same condition.

To those who still dare to point out the inconsistency of these changing positions, they have a new tactic. Now they claim that what we are seeing is extreme weather events — which just happen to be a “predicted” signal of climate change. The beauty of that prediction is that it doesn’t need to have any predictive content at all. No matter what happens, anything that seems in any way different from the past can be claimed as unusual, i.e., “extreme.”

Considering the ingenuousness of constructing an argument that is essentially unfalsifiable — less snow means climate change, more snow means climate change — one may ask, What exactly would *not* be claimed as evidence of climate change? What would be our experience if we were not experiencing change according to these people’s arguments?

The facile answer would be: no change in the amount of snowfall (though I doubt they would offer that option). But then we should ask, no change from when? Ten years ago, 50 years ago, 100 years ago?

But wait, the recent levels of snowfall broke records for the DC area from about 111 years ago, by just a little bit. Does that mean we were experiencing extreme weather events 111 years ago, so the current weather isn’t really unprecedented, except to a very small degree, if at all?

What were the typical snowfall levels over a hundred years ago? We know they weren’t greater than the snowfalls of 1898–99, since those set the previous record. Maybe the typical levels were much lower than those experienced

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Obamalaise

by Gary Jason

When it comes to presidential liars,
Obama makes Clinton and Bush look like
novices.

An ocean of ink has been devoted to the surprising election results in Virginia, New Jersey, and especially Massachusetts. There is so much angst in the country that even the exceptionally obtuse Obama has become aware of it. To use a term rendered infamous by the feckless Jimmy Carter, we are experiencing a national malaise. But what Obama fails to comprehend is that at the root of the current national malaise is Obama himself.

In this, as in many other ways, Obama uncannily resembles Carter, who projected his own defects of thought and action onto the nation, generating the anxiety and distrust he was purporting to heal. We can rightly call the national mood “Obamalaise,” because it arises not just from Obama’s agenda but from his character.

A major factor in Obamalaise is, of course, the lingering economic recession. The unemployment rate seems stuck at 10%. But it’s really worse than that. The December 2009 Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) report put nonfarm job losses at 85,000 in November but showed that unemployment stayed at 10% — because so many people (over 660,000) had given up looking for work. The BLS household survey — a more accurate indicator of the unemployment picture, because it measures underemployed along with unemployed — put the

November loss at nearly 590,000 jobs.

More recent data are not encouraging. The January 2010 report put the nonfarm job losses at only 20,000, but it showed that the December report underreported the number of unemployed. The unemployment rate dropped to 9.7%, but again this was because of the large number of people who were no longer searching for work. The Bureau of Labor Statistics job report for Feb. 5 showed that roughly 15 million Americans remained out of work.

Even if the economy continues to expand, job growth will probably continue to lag, for reasons I explore below. And we can’t be sure it will continue to expand. Nouriel Roubini — to cite only one economist who holds this view — predicts that the economy will grow at only 3% in the first half of the year, then drop to 1% or 1.5% in the second half, with unemployment possibly hitting 11%.

Which of Obama's actions have led to this malaise? Quite a few, but let me just review six major fields in which the president's work has been counterproductive, to say the least.

First, he has focused almost exclusively on forcing some kind of massive new healthcare entitlement on the country. This has had three perverse effects, all of which have deterred

Obama's cap-and-trade bill, should it be enacted, will cost 3.2 million jobs over 15 years and \$9.9 trillion by 2035.

hiring. As Kathryn Nix emphasized in a report for the Heritage Institute (Jan. 12), no matter which version of the bill would have been passed, it would have imposed massive new labor expenses on small businesses, which create the bulk of new jobs.

Moreover, as the different versions of healthcare were negotiated, the uncertainty as to what new regulatory burdens the insurance, pharmaceutical, and medical industries would be saddled with made them unwilling to undertake expansion. Finally, in crusading into an area where nobody really saw a crisis, Obama overlooked the economic crisis that everybody recognizes as real. Scott Brown's election has, perhaps, slain Obamacare, but Obama has made it clear he will keep on the issue.

Second, there is Obama's reflexive tendency to bash business, obviously an outward manifestation of an inner — what? lack of enthusiasm for? or is it loathing of? — free enterprise. He has vociferously attacked doctors, insurance companies, banks — everyone but lawyers. As Amity Shlaes has noted, in this Obama resembles one of his heroes, FDR, whose demonizing of business was a major factor in prolonging the Great Depression. "Roosevelt's tender mercies toward businesses," she says, "so terrified companies that they postponed both hiring and investment."

In February Obama's Two-Minutes Hate against banks dropped the Dow by 5% in three days. Is it any wonder that in a recent poll of investors and analysts who are Bloomberg subscribers 77% said that Obama is antibusiness?

Third, Obama's conspicuous stiffing of secured lenders has — naturally — discouraged lending. His thoroughly immoral bankruptcy deal with GM and Chrysler cheated the secured creditors in favor of the United Auto Workers Union. Who is eager to lend money to businesses, now that the secured lender's claim on assets (set by a century of bankruptcy law) can be negated by one call from a union boss to the White House?

Meanwhile, Obama's mortgage modification program (aptly nicknamed the "mortgage cram down plan") forces mortgage holders to renegotiate *legal* contracts to the holder's detriment — another discouragement to lending. There has to be a kind of blindness in an administration that would lead it to institute a program that screws lenders for past loans, then bashes them for not issuing enough new ones.

Fourth, Obama has pushed an extreme environmentalist agenda that is a major drag on employment. According to

the estimate from last year by the Charles River Associates, his cap-and-trade bill, which passed the House and awaits approval in the Senate, will cost 3.2 million jobs over 15 years, should it be enacted. And a study this year from the Heritage Foundation estimates the cost of cap-and-trade, if enacted, at \$9.9 trillion by 2035.

Then there is the whole wacky "green jobs" plan to replace jobs in fossil fuel industries with jobs in the wind and solar power industries. As George Will warned last year (Washington Post, June 25), the Spanish experience demonstrates that such a plan creates far fewer jobs than it costs. The reason is bloody obvious to all but the economically clueless: replacing one source of power with another source, which happens to cost hundreds of times more to produce, destroys jobs elsewhere.

But this hasn't stopped Obama's Interior Secretary Ken Salazar from directing his agency to ratchet up regulations on oil and natural gas companies seeking to drill on federal lands. Obama clearly intends to break his campaign promise to expand domestic drilling.

Fifth, Obama is the most protectionist president since Hoover. He has refused to enact the free trade agreements (FTAs) that were on his desk the day he walked into the Oval Office (including agreements with Colombia, Panama, and South Korea), much less negotiate any new ones. Meanwhile, our trading competitors are increasing the pace of signing new FTAs, especially in Asia.

Worse, Obama's actions have caused mini-trade wars with our partners. There is the breaking of our NAFTA agreement that allows a small number of Mexican trucks to operate in the United States, an event that has led Mexico to impose tariffs on our goods. The "Buy American" provisions in Obama's stimulus bill have led to retaliation by Canada. And his tariffs on tires and other products have led the Chinese to slap major tariffs of their own on our products, and to file suit against us at the WTO, and most recently dump \$35 billion of our bonds in one month.

Sixth, Obama's spending is grotesque and destructive. Over 2.7 million jobs have been lost since the passage of his deceptively named stimulus bill (priced at \$787 billion). He will add more to the deficit in the first 20 months of his presidency than his predecessor did in eight years — and George W. Bush was certainly no slouch in the deficit department. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that the deficit for 2010 will hit \$1.6 trillion, higher than the record \$1.5 trillion deficit of 2009. And it estimates a deficit of nearly \$1 trillion in 2011.

The metastasizing deficit causes profound unease, because people know what it entails: massive new taxes, or massive inflation, or both. Already the end of the Bush tax cuts draws nigh: next year, the top income tax rate will go from 35% back up to 39.6%, the capital gains tax from 15% back up to 20%, and the dividend tax from 15% back up to 39.6%. The estate tax will rise from zero this year back to 55%. With trillion-dollar deficits as far as the eye can see, the Obama administration will gladly let tax cuts expire.

Indeed, Obama has stoked fears of massive new taxes with his recent pronouncement that he is open to raising taxes on households earning less than \$250,000 a year, despite his

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Creating Paradise

by Jeff Wrobel

What can individuals do to solve social problems? Plenty.

One of the greatest, though unsung, heroes of the Marshall Islands is my friend Gene Savage. With one simple act, he altered the existence of the entire population of a remote island, changing it from a living hell into a peaceful near-utopia.

You've almost certainly never heard of Mejit Island. It is one of hundreds in the Marshall Islands, on the eastern edge of Micronesia. Chart a course from anywhere to anywhere, and Mejit will not lie on that course. It is a peanut-shaped island and, at 0.72 square miles, nearly peanut-sized. It is home to about 450 people.

Most islands in Micronesia are remnants of coral reefs that formed around ancient islands. In most cases the original island has completely eroded away, leaving small sections of reef that are just barely above water at current sea levels. Typically, these islands are about a quarter mile wide and less than a mile long, which is why the region is called Micronesia. Where the ancient island has disappeared, what usually remains is a relatively shallow lagoon.

Mejit is an exception to this pattern. It is comparable in size to one of the coral isles of an atoll, but it is an ancient island that has not completely eroded away. It is not the remnants of a reef, but a proper island with its own small bar-

rier reef. And, most importantly to this story, Mejit has a little lake in the middle of its northern half — about 2,000 feet long, 200 feet wide, and 20 feet deep at its lowest point (a bit more after a heavy rain). Most Micronesians on other islands have to catch and store rainwater, but Mejit has its own permanent natural freshwater reservoir.

In 1994, my friend Gene was a civilian working on the U.S. Army base in the Marshalls. He took advantage of his time there to visit a few of the nearby islands; and, as a member of a church outreach group, he visited Mejit. While each island he had visited had its charm, they didn't vary much from one to the next. Mejit, however, was special. For one thing, Gene was delighted to encounter the lake. He was also captivated by a particular resident of the island — a young Marshallese woman named Neyrann. He began courting her, and he eagerly planned future trips to Mejit.

Gene loved Mejit. But there was one serious problem. Though the human population benefited from the freshwater

reservoir, the lake created a perfect breeding environment for mosquitoes. Aside from Neyrann and the lake, the island's most notable feature, for Gene, was the mosquitoes. When he examined the lake closely, the only living things he found were algae and mosquito larvae.

Life for the people on this otherwise idyllic tropical island was ruined by the overwhelming, ever-present swarm of mosquitoes. Life for the mosquitoes, on the other hand, was great; they had a large supply of human blood, and they had no

Imagine a new Mosquito Eradication Bureau in the finest building on Mejit, and a tax to support it. Who could argue with the need?

natural predators. Given the choice between being sucked dry of their blood and inhaling poisonous fumes all night, most islanders chose to burn antimosquito coils in their houses, despite the clear warnings on the boxes against indoor use.

The lack of natural predators for the mosquitoes suggested to Gene that the mosquitoes were recent immigrants to the island. Most likely, he thought, they had arrived on cargo ships when they started regular trips to the Marshalls. But since the natural balance was already upset, Gene figured that there was no harm in upsetting it a little further. A couple of months after his first trip, he went back to Mejit to see Neyrann, bring Christmas toys for the island children, and bring a Christmas present for the lake as well — a little plastic bag containing about two dozen guppies that he had acquired from a friend's aquarium. He dumped the fish into the south end of the lake. They swam off.

The next morning he returned to look for the fish but could not find them. He figured that something in the lake hadn't agreed with them, and they were dead.

Six months passed. Gene went to Mejit again, this time to marry his island girl. On his first day there he looked for signs of the fish he had released, but he saw nothing. It must have been true: the lake just wasn't hospitable to them.

Two days later, Neyrann became Mrs. Savage. After the wedding, Gene and Neyrann followed the island custom of walking around the lake thanking people for attending the ceremony. One woman asked what kind of fish he had put in the lake six months earlier. He told her they were minnows (which isn't correct, but you have to allow heroes their little flaws). "Too bad though," he said, "I haven't been able to find any." She replied, "Oh, there are lots of them over here," and she directed him to her back door near the lake. Gene couldn't believe his eyes. He saw hundreds of fish swimming about, including some large ones, two or three inches long.

"Has anyone else seen them?" he asked the woman. "Yes!" she answered. "People are putting them in their wells to eat the mosquitoes." She told Gene how the fish picked at your skin when you stood still. The children enjoyed that; they claimed that the fish are cleaning them. Later Gene got into the water and felt the fish pecking him all over. He donned his mask and snorkel and was thrilled to see guppies every-

where. Best of all, there wasn't a mosquito larva in sight.

Gene worried about what the guppies were going to eat, now that there were no mosquito larvae. But in his last trip there, in 2002, the guppies were still plentiful, and the mosquitoes were gone.


You never know what the results will be when you introduce a non-native species into an environment. It will pry itself into the food chain somewhere, and it may compete with native species in the same place in the chain. The new species may eat too much of one thing, or create new waste that chokes off something else. The implications of the presence of an exotic species may be too complex even to be recognized. But in the case of Mejit, nothing but good seems to have come from the introduction.

Mejit is far isolated by ocean water from the nearest place that could support guppies, so there's virtually no chance of them escaping on their own and affecting some other habitat. Before the guppies arrived there were already a lot of birds on Mejit eating the plentiful reef fish and washing them down with freshwater from the lake, so there isn't likely to be much increase in bird droppings because of an increase in birds at the lake. The only downside I can see is if someone who used to enjoy swimming in the lake stopped doing so because he didn't like the fish pecking at him. But I would think that even that person would view it as an equitable alternative to living with mosquitoes.

One downside for merchants only: sales of mosquito coils plummeted to zero.

As an engineer, Gene saw a problem and, by his nature, wanted to solve it. As a caring human being, Gene saw the suffering of the people and wanted to relieve it. He is not the type of person who likes to draw attention to himself. He didn't act to achieve fame or gratitude. But regardless of that, the citizens of Mejit remember Gene and recognize him every time he visits. No visit has passed without some words of gratitude to him.

It's fortunate for all parties that Mejit is, for the most part, off the government radar. An alternative to Gene's simple, elegant solution might have been a government effort to eradicate the insect pests. I can envision endless environmental studies, multiple travel junkets by politicians and scientists, mosquito netting purchases, periodic spraying campaigns, and condescending, paternalistic, self-righteous bureaucracy. Imagine a new Mosquito Eradication Bureau in the finest building on Mejit, and a tax to support it all. Who could argue with the need for it? Mejit islanders are grateful that the mosquitoes are gone, but they may not know how lucky they are that Gene saw the problem before government set its sights on it.

Except for this story, there is no record of what Gene did. There are various plaques, museums, and gravestones scattered around the Marshall Islands to remind people of big events, such as the "discovery" of the islands by John Charles Marshall in 1788, the epic battles of WWII, and the atomic testing of the 1950s. These monuments are sufficient reminders of the large, discernible events that shaped the region. But if we ever start erecting monuments to people who have invisibly benefited the people while slowing the growth of government, there should be a big statue of Gene Savage at the south end of the lake on Mejit Island. 

Marketing Morality

by Brian J. Gladish

Competition brings better results in business. Why wouldn't it do so in the judiciary as well?

Libertarians have always been foes of state monopolies — of business, of education, of the money supply. They have always expounded the economic benefits of competition, benefits that could not have been planned and often could not have been predicted. Friedrich Hayek went further, arguing that competition leads to equally unpredictable discoveries of knowledge (see his essay “Competition as a Discovery Procedure,” in “The Essence of Hayek” [1984]). Now it is time to suggest the value of competing ethical systems and to challenge the state’s monopoly on ethics and their legal enforcement.

Ethical systems have been traced to various origins. Some, such as Christian and Islamic ethics, are represented as having been handed down from God. Others are thought to be derived in some way from human nature (natural law) or identified by their ability to promote human happiness (the various forms of utilitarianism). Among thinkers in the libertarian tradition, Ayn Rand and Murray Rothbard developed systems explicitly based on natural law; and Andrew Galambos claimed to derive an ethical system from scientific study of the nature of volitional beings. These systems attempted to show how human beings (or volitional beings in the case of Galambos) should behave in order to further the development of their own nature or happiness.

While each of these natural rights systems offered to increase the happiness or “flourishing” of its adherents, no strict test of their practical utility was proposed. They were presented as systems of right and wrong — and of justice — to which people should adhere. Their motto was *fiat justitia, pereat mundus*: let justice be done, though the world perish. That was true of them whether they were based on theories of the free market, the minimal state, or the stateless society (Ayn Rand retained the existence of a minimal state, while Rothbard and Galambos dispensed with it).

Alternative systems of ethics developed within the utilitarian tradition, beginning with Epicurus and proceeding through David Hume, Jeremy Bentham, and John Stuart Mill. Utilitarians have usually favored state intervention to accomplish their goal of the greatest happiness for the greatest number — although Ludwig von Mises, who was both a classical liberal and a self-declared utilitarian, generally

argued against the possibility that intervention would achieve the goals intended. Mises and the other economists of the Austrian school considered it impossible to quantify interpersonal comparisons of “utility,” thereby greatly weakening its application as a means of justifying state intervention in people’s lives.

How, indeed, can one test the effects of an ethical system and discover which works best? This question becomes especially important when one considers the connection between ethical and legal systems. When ethical systems intersect with the state, they produce legal systems that are imposed upon

In a free-market ethics system, if a company had an attractive ethical system it could be expected to attract customers and grow. Superior systems will be reproduced; inferior ones will die out.

the inhabitants within its borders. In the time of monarchy the legal system reflected the religion of the monarch and whatever concepts of justice the monarch held. In modern democracies the legal system is a reflection of struggles among various groups and may reflect most fundamentally the views of the religious majority. The system that most clearly reflects evolutionary market forces is English common law, but even in that case the discovery process is hampered by the fact that competition among courts is limited and petitioners may not choose the legal system by which a case will be tried.

To discover which legal and ethical system works best for the people who use it, and in what ways, we need a free market in judicial services.

For an example, let’s turn to the field of intellectual property, which is the subject of much current debate. Suppose we have a judicial company called Protects Intellectual Property (PIP). This company promotes the view that intellectual achievement has value, should be treated as property and should be paid for as other commodities are. This approach approximates the views of Galambos and of the 19th-century legal theorist Lysander Spooner in his quaintly titled “Letter to Scientists and Inventors on the Science of Justice, and Their Right of Perpetual Property in Their Discoveries and Inventions.”

Let us also suppose that judgments by PIP against “offenders” have no force other than the force of public opinion. The company may request a payment from them and publish the fact that they have paid, paid partially, or not paid at all. Customers of PIP have access to judgment information and may choose to avoid releasing intellectual products (books, music, inventions) to companies or individuals that do not have a good record of payment.

Note that this admittedly abstract business plan does not violate any of Rothbard’s views as expressed in “The Ethics of Liberty” (1998) or impose a new definition of property upon those of his followers who now reject all forms of intellectual

property (although Rothbard himself supported copyright). But if PIP is successful — if it attracts clients, successfully furthers their interests and, in so doing, generates a profit — it matters not whether certain segments of society accept or reject the concept of intellectual property. If PIP fails in this endeavor, no amount of arguing the merits of Spooner’s or Galambos’ points will matter; when the investment capital runs out the company will disappear. In a free market, it would not have been the only ethics-based company available.

Of course, there are bound to be problems if individuals enter into contracts with different companies providing judicial services that reflect different ethical systems (e.g. Christian, Islamic, Rothbardian, Galambosian, etc.) to resolve their disputes, defend or recover their property, and so forth. But would these problems be greater than those that exist right now in determining outcomes between the legal systems of different countries — or, in the United States, among various local and state jurisdictions? Today, the execution of a judgment or transfer of an alleged criminal between jurisdictions involves processes that would also evolve quite naturally between justice companies. If companies did not have reciprocal agreements (because of remoteness, neglect, or aversion), disputes that crossed their boundaries might not be resolved, just as some are not resolved today. Any loss might be covered by insurance, as business losses are often covered now.

But let’s consider an extreme example: murder. Suppose that a person who subscribes to a restitution-based ethics company — one that primarily seeks monetary compensation — murders someone who subscribes to a retribution-based ethics company — one that seeks some sort of penalty that may be imposed with violence. We can imagine that the perpetrator will be identified by the victim’s company and some judgment will be made. If the judgment is a death sentence (remember, this is an extreme example), and an attempt is made to carry it out without consultation, or if the evidence is weak, the perpetrator’s company may very well attempt to defend its client against the claim. But if there is consultation, the perpetrator’s company may suggest some other remedy (say, the payment of the costs of identifying their client as the perpetrator, plus a punitive sum). Or, in light of the evidence, the company might even stand aside. Note that mistakes in identifying perpetrators will invite unfavorable market consequences, and companies that make them may face a loss of confidence and become the target of judgments brought by those adversely affected — judgments that may be minimized by early acceptance and prompt payment.

This is a speculative example, not an ideological blueprint to be followed in creating a utopian society. It simply presents some possibilities. The intention is to inspire fresh thinking by people who are unfamiliar with the body of libertarian literature that discusses such matters. All readers are encouraged to consider their own ideas as possible competitors in an ethics and legalities marketplace, as opposed to complete systems that must be imposed upon society.

In a free-market ethics system, each company would be able to codify its ethical system and advertise it, along with endorsements from satisfied customers. If a company had an

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The View From Lulu's

by Jacques Delacroix

Sit down, have some coffee, and watch the
parallel universes go by.

At 9, two flows of humanity pass each other in front of Lulu Carpenter's, the upscale coffee shop at the top of Pacific Avenue. Pacific Avenue is the main walking commercial thoroughfare in Santa Cruz, California, redesigned surprisingly well after the 1989 earthquake. It's nothing like the collection of cheap motels leading to the boardwalk that greets the casual tourist entering Santa Cruz from Ocean Avenue.

Down Pacific comes the cortege of the houseless, walking from the shelter toward breakfast at the Salvation Army, a mile away. I don't call them "homeless," because ownership of a house does not guarantee a home, and it's possible to make a home without a house. Also, I am sick of the sanctimoniousness of the word. Most of the houseless carry a large backpack. The smart ones carry a guitar, or a guitar case, one of the best weapons against the city's repressive ordinances. (See below.)

It would not take much to convince me that some of the homeless have a hangover. They are mostly silent. Those who are not harangue loudly against society at large, or God, or no one in particular. One talks into a cellphone she does not have. I know for a fact that one houseless woman in her 30s can speak perfect French, with the quaint diction of what is probably a Swiss finishing school. (Trust me, I would never

know how to make up something like this.)

Up Pacific Avenue from the bus depot march Mexicans on their way to work. They converse loudly in Spanish. Many laugh or guffaw. The Mexicans all wear thick sensible jackets in dark colors, black, navy blue, or gray. The houseless tend to be elaborately dressed, layer upon layer. It's not all about the morning cold: many women, and quite a few men, wear colorful Indian, or otherwise "ethnic," dress on top of jeans and sweaters. Every single one of the houseless is an Anglo. Perhaps race matters, after all.

Much of residential Santa Cruz is littered. I believe my own street is never swept by the city. But Pacific Avenue, the showcase artery, is cleaned every day or nearly so. There are two distinct cleanup crews. You can tell which is coming from afar. The first crew is large, youngish, noisy, and enthusiastic. It's composed entirely of mentally handicapped people and

of their minders. They make noise because they are invariably in good spirits, kidding one another endlessly and throwing good-humored insults around. When they are through, hardly a single cigarette butt has managed to conceal itself in a crack.

The other crew comprises mostly people in their 40s and 50s in green uniforms who work slowly, with the dignity befitting their status as tenured city employees. They are said to be the best paid municipal employees anywhere in America. I think this is probably fair because I suspect most of them hold a Master's in Comparative Literature, or Fine Arts, from the University of California. They contribute to the *gravitas* of the community.

Lulu's, the coffee shop, manages to maintain a steady truce between environmentally militant, abstemious, vegetarian types who hate tobacco, and smokers. I think this is because almost all the smokers are alternative lifestyle youths with pierced body parts, and existentialist graduate students from UC Santa Cruz. No one wants to find out how tough the pierced ones really are, and the graduate students earn respect by appearing to be in possession of profound truths that don't even have a name in English. I think both the pierced and the existentialists are, paradoxically, individualists of the old school.

By and large though, the smokers are pigs: they throw cigarette filters with a half-life of 20 years on the ground although they are only ten feet from a litter box. Nobody ever complains about the littering because neatness is a bourgeois virtue incompatible with the community's revolutionary spirit. I think most city elections are disputed between Maoists and Trotskyites, who have been in the closet elsewhere since 1971, and a few left-leaning liberals. All are prosperous shopkeepers. Together they promulgate and try to implement city ordinances that are probably neither constitutional nor enforceable. How can you make sleeping illegal? Scratch a leftist; find an authoritarian vice-principal. But I digress, as usual. Lulu's owner runs a tight ship. He takes care of the butts problem in the old-fashioned, entrepreneurial way, by

giving someone ten bucks to sweep most of the butts from his vicinity every night.

Shortly after nine, people come in for takeout coffee. The young ones are mostly workers from neighborhood shops who got up too late to fix their own coffee. (The result of a recurring epidemic: the young believe something tremendous will happen if only they stay up late enough.) A few customers sit down to read in solitude, or they chat in groups of two or three to kick off the day with conviviality. No one knows what they do for a living. The young are probably students;

They try to implement ordinances that are neither constitutional nor enforceable. How can you make sleeping illegal?

the middle-aged may be teachers (like me), or independently wealthy. (Santa Cruz's own dangerous secrets: who is a trust fund baby? Who made a real estate fortune in the '70s?) One can't easily tell the well-off from the poor because shabby clothing is de rigueur.

There are some old codgers who have probably been awake for hours. I avoid them, because I suspect they want to induct me into their mutual misery society: let me tell you about my colonoscopy; I will listen about your arthritis. Among those who sit alone, reading a newspaper is common. They read the local giveaway sheet (surprisingly good, though uneven) or the Santa Cruz Sentinel (bad spelling, good local coverage, bad international coverage), the San Jose Mercury News (there are a few techies left after the dotcom debacle), the San Francisco Chronicle (for bottom feeders like me), or The New York Times, of course. A lot of New York Times are left on the tables in a gesture of collectivist pretend-individualism common in coffee shops all over America. No one has the *cojones* to read The Wall Street Journal in public. There would be a hell's worth of shunning to pay if you got caught.

The serving staff is young, friendly, and sunny. Most of them nurture a creative sideline: painting, writing, music, the pursuit of esoteric beliefs. They are all avid readers, making Lulu's a much better literary cafe than Saint Germain-des-Prés ever knew. One young guy reads big postmodernist books of French origin. I am dying to warn him that bad French never translates into good English. I resist the temptation because youth must be allowed to make its own mistakes. I think the young people on the staff worry sometimes about what being the victims of customers' jovial moods and gracious appreciation is going to do to their long-term creativity, which as everyone knows requires a dose of misery.

There is a punk rocker who works in the kitchen. His temples are shaved and a silver stud pierces his upper chin. He is a real conservative who works two jobs so his wife can stay home and take care of their child. This guy will never be on welfare. He is against drugs, except tobacco. I swap him stories for cigarettes. What a deal!



"If it's any consolation, we use *every part* of the explorer."

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Alverna's World: A Small Town in 1920

by Bruce Ramsey

A hundred years ago, freedom — and
society — looked quite different.

Once there was a world of few regulations and no welfare state. There were rules, of course, but there was considerable flexibility in the application of the rules, at least some of them.

This is a story about what life was like in one place in that world — Morton, Washington, a logging town in the western foothills of the Cascade Mountains, near Mount Rainier. It is told by Alverna Kavanaugh, who died in 2007 at the age of 101. She was my aunt, and the family storyteller.

In 1912, Alverna's father, Clyde Smith, brought the family to Morton, where he opened a hardware store. . . . But let Alverna tell the story. Most of it is in her words, tape recorded. I trimmed it down and stitched it together. It is a story of the world that America once was — a different place, and interesting in ways you might not predict.

Alverna Kavanaugh's Story

Morton wasn't a place where many newcomers came to settle. Many of the people there were of pioneer stock. They were the Temples, the Broadbents, the Stiltners, and the Crumbs. Most of their fathers and mothers had packed in to claim narrow strips of land. The Crumbs had gotten theirs at the time of Abraham Lincoln. Only the Broadbents had made more than an ordinary amount of money.

Everyone seemed to find a place. Everyone knew exactly what was going on, and when a stranger came to town.

Everyone was subject to unwritten laws. To break them would cause more attention than it was worth. The community was sure of what was right, though it made no claim that everyone was perfect.

We had a town drunk. Every so often he would get bleary-eyed and stagger down the street ripping off fence pickets. Everyone knew that in a day or so he'd be nailing them back up.

Most of the time, he'd sit with the older men in front of the pool hall or the barber shop. In winter, they'd move inside my father's hardware store, sit on nail kegs, and spit tobacco juice into the pot-bellied stove. The hardware didn't have a cracker barrel like the grocery, but it had a more masculine tolerance, and customers kept the flow of information fresh and lively.

We had a town prostitute, the oldest girl from a big farm family — hardworking people, not much money. She was discreet. She'd go out to Tacoma for a week, and she'd come back with new clothes. People asked, "Where did she get

the money? How could you earn all that in one week?" She was good-natured, plump, and naturally blonde. I remember seeing her, and the comments, "There she goes on the bus again."

She was still in Morton when I came back to teach a year there, in 1940–41. She'd married a war veteran, who was sick and didn't have much money. That was the time when women of my mother's age, who could remember this woman's past, argued about whether to let her into the Eastern Star. They finally did.

When my father decided to go into the hardware business, he chose Morton by asking hardware salesmen. The salesmen said, "Up at Morton, they don't have any hardware. There's a lot of timber, and there's loggers." Before he left he hired a clerk he knew, and paid him double what ordinary clerks got, to move to Morton. Later they became partners.

Another young man came with Dad to Morton. When Dad built his store, he included a narrow strip for this young man to establish a haberdashery. Loggers needed shirts and boots and pants. This haberdashery didn't run the full depth of the building. The back opened right on to Dad's potbellied stove.

The haberdasher did well. He married and had two daughters, and one was named Alverna, after me. Later, he took up with a redheaded woman in town. My mother said that when this redhead came in to look for an umbrella, the haberdasher locked his front door and pulled down the blinds. He didn't have any business for half an hour or so. Dad and his clerk knew what was going on, but they didn't presume to say he couldn't.

Well, Morton was a little town. Things like that get around. Everybody could see the blinds down in the middle of the afternoon. And at public dances, the haberdasher would dance with this woman. The haberdasher's wife responded by making the redhead her best friend, inviting her to Tacoma in their new car. This was to stop all the talk. But it didn't stop the talk. It didn't change anything, except to show that his wife wasn't breaking up her marriage on account of a red-headed woman.

My dad carried mostly very useful things in the hardware: stoves, simple furniture, plain dishes, ropes, chains, bolts and nuts, and things for logging camps. He had a credit business, but he ran it carefully. He knew which men were entitled to

Only about five students a year made it through high school. Girls often married at 16, and any strong boy of 16 would usually rather be out logging.

credit, which men would pay. He'd be understanding when a man might be working hard and living on venison. If that man needed an airtight stove because his other one was falling apart and he had five kids, of course he could have credit.

Sears & Roebuck would sometimes write and ask my dad a man's credit standing. He felt it was ridiculous for them to ask, because they were competitors. Why should he tell them?

So when a man was poor at paying — and often, people who had ruined their credit with him would try to get it elsewhere — Dad would write, "Fine. Give the man all the credit he wants."

Dad's hardware also carried coffins, because nobody else in the community would take care of a death. So he did. He learned how to do embalming, and was licensed. But he tried to dissuade people who couldn't afford it from buying expensive coffins.

One widow insisted on having the most expensive casket he had. He tried to persuade her not to buy it, because he knew she couldn't pay for it. She shouldn't even try to pay

There weren't many charity cases in Morton, and the businessmen handled them in a quiet way. One had been a Mason, so the Masonic lodge saw that he had what he needed.

for it; the money should go to her children. But no sir, she wept and wailed, and insisted on having the very best. So my dad let her have it, knowing he would never get paid. He was careful not to give too much credit, but in this case, with a woman deep in grief, he just gave in.

Dad loved to play cards. In the early days, he'd play with the salesmen who came up to Morton to sell hardware. Sometimes they gambled. My mother worried about gambling. She always had her ears out. Apparently she heard about it, because one time she went to the pool hall and into the back room. The table was covered with chips and cards and gold. She said, "Aha! I knew it!" And she turned the table upside down in front of the men. Dad would occasionally tell this story, and laugh. He'd say, "You know, I was winning, too."

I think that ended his gambling for money, but he still loved to play cards at the pool hall two blocks from home. I knew he was up there in the evenings. I guess the chips had to be taken out in merchandise, because he'd come home with candy bars and chips. Marie and I used to be given chips, and we could go back to that pool hall and buy ice cream.

My father played cards with us children, too. As soon as we could hold cards, he organized simple games. While he did it, he taught a moral lesson. It was that the cards demanded moral standards. You don't cheat. You don't peek at somebody else's hand. You don't fidget and give away that you have a bad hand, or say, "Woooo! I've got a wonderful hand!" You're stoic. The game demands this.

If you got a bad hand, you were not to feel downhearted because you lost. If you played all the tricks you could get, you were a success. If you didn't play them right, Dad didn't scold you. But afterwards, he told you how you could have done better. So, while some people felt that cards were sinful because people could gamble with them, my father taught lessons with them.

Only about five students a year made it through Morton High School. Girls often married at 16, and any strong boy

of 16 would usually rather be out logging than in freshman English. If he did get to high school, it was more schooling than his pa had, and likely more than he'd ever need.

I was the fourth of five children. My two older brothers did not finish high school, and my older sister came to graduation and didn't qualify for it. Well, I think the teacher and the superintendent, who both knew Dad, just made it up between them: if my sister outlined the history book, she could get credit for history. She didn't get it all done, but they passed her anyway. She didn't have any ambition to go to college or do anything with it. The next year, she was pregnant.

I was different. I did well in school. Everything was easy. We had one geography book. Well, I could read down that two-page assignment, and I'd have it memorized. And when it came to reading "Ivanhoe," I wanted to read ahead, despite what the teacher said. At 11, Dad signed me up for violin lessons. He had a violin that had come down from his grandfather. There had been three generations of fiddlers who could play by ear, but I was to learn to read music. Mother said, "My father wouldn't allow a violin in the house. He felt the devil was in it." The violin made people dance, and that was wicked. But Mother didn't feel that way.

No one at Morton could teach me the violin. My father drove me Saturdays on the new road to Tacoma, about 60 miles away, where I could take lessons and he could place hardware orders. When it came to my senior year in high school, 1923-24, my father sent me to Tacoma to live in a boarding house so I could go to Stadium High School. I went on from there to the University of Washington, where I earned a degree in music.

I wasn't the only one to be sent out. One pioneer farm family, the Crumbs, sent its firstborn son out of town for four years of high school. That was unheard of. That family couldn't afford such extravagance. In due course, without the village approval, they sent out the second son, the third and the fourth. The fifth son didn't want to go, but by that time it was a tradition, and everybody agreed that he had to go, too.

There weren't many charity cases in Morton, and the businessmen handled them in a quiet way. There was a Civil War veteran. He was so old that people marveled that he could take care of himself alone in a one-room shack. He'd been a Mason, so the Masonic lodge saw that he had what he needed. But when they offered him better housing, he was too proud to take it. He said, "Oh, I don't need much. A little tobacco. After all, when I was young, I helled around."

When it got cold, he'd come down to the hardware and join the men telling stories, chewing tobacco, and spitting in the stove.

The other charity case was the minister. Morton wasn't a churchgoing town. Saturday night dances drew nearly everyone, but Sunday-morning services in the Methodist church, the only one in town, would have about ten people. The minister wasn't often called on to officiate at marriages. They were usually elopements. Only at funerals did everyone require the minister, who conducted them with lavish formality.

My dad would give the minister, who looked half-starved, \$50 or \$100. He would tell him, "This is not to go to the mission in China. This is for you." Mrs. Broadbent, a relation of one of the pioneer families, arranged for the minister to have one good meal a day at the hotel. People expected him to live in genteel poverty. When a minister came who had a little

Ford, and he used it to get from the parsonage to town — only about six blocks — he was criticized. It wasn't right that he should have a car and burn up gas for that. He soon left. The village doctor had a Ford, but that was not seen as a luxury. Doc had to be able to get to the logging camps in a hurry.

I was 12 and my younger sister Marie was 8 when the flu hit Morton. That was the great influenza of 1918, in which half a million Americans died. Both of us had it. I got better, and

The other charity case was the minister. Morton wasn't a churchgoing town. Only at funerals did everyone require the minister.

Marie did too. It was a while before we had our first solid food, because in those days when we were sick, we were on a liquid diet. They gave us beef tea, a little milk, and a cracker. Then we could have a sliver of turkey and a spoonful of dressing. But we were to stay in bed and keep under the covers. Marie and I had a pillow fight, and she didn't stay under the covers. The next night she was sick again. I was getting well. The next afternoon the doctor said, "She's the sickest patient I have."

Dad had buried many of his friends and business associates. He said, "Why didn't the doctor tell me sooner? I could have put her on the train to Tacoma, and got her to a hospital." But the train had left, and the road didn't go through to Tacoma then. So Dad wired for an engine and a caboose. It cost him \$600. When that came out in Morton, people thought it was amazing. Years later, I met a man up at Morton. "You're C.B. Smith's daughter, aren't you? You know, I was on the caboose that took your little sister to Tacoma." It was an event spoken of for years.

So the tracks were cleared, and Marie rode to Tacoma. Mother and Dad, too. An ambulance picked her up at the station and whisked her to the hospital, right then. That's Dad! The doctor in Tacoma said, "Feed her. Give her cream. Give her something rich so she has the strength to fight this." None of the barley-water the other doctor had suggested. Marie made a good recovery.

Morton had one police officer. Nothing much ever happened except chicken stealing, and who would begrudge a boy a chicken to roast in the woods? Once the cop hit a man over the head because he brought liquor into a Saturday night dance instead of stashing it in the woodpile. People thought this was unreasonable, and hired a new cop.

Another town had a case of a rape. They got a posse and caught the man, and my brother was in on it. He said they debated about castrating the man. They thought they should. But they decided that he might bleed to death, and it would be murder, so they didn't do it. They turned him over to the law.

Dad, being a merchant, wanted fire protection. He contributed the first \$500, about all that was needed, to buy a cart that the men could pull and connect to a hydrant. They erected a tower with a bell on it. If you saw a fire, you pulled the bell.

Morton didn't have a fire department. The men were volunteers. Their job wasn't to put the fire out, but to hose down the buildings not on fire.

That didn't always work. In 1924, the whole business district burned to the ground. It started in the hotel at about one in the morning. The two-story hotel was right opposite my

The posse debated castrating the rapist. But they decided that he might bleed to death, and it would be murder, so they didn't do it.

father's store, and the wind blew the flames straight to the hardware. My father opened the building to get his business records. Already people had slipped in and taken some fishing gear. Others were removing things. Dad locked the door. He said he didn't want any question about insurance claims; he had taken out more coverage about six months before. Somebody said it was a shame for all that hardware to burn up.

The men struggled to get the heavy barber chair out of the hotel and down the street. They stopped. When the fire moved closer, they pulled it a little farther. Finally they left it in a vacant lot, and the fire ruined it.

We got our valuables out of the house. Dad put all his business records in his car. I carried my Persian cat out in the fish basket. Dad drove me down the road a quarter mile to guard these treasures. My cat yowled, and I wondered whether the fire would follow me down the road, because it was timber on both sides.

I don't think any homes burned, but the grocery that had only been up six months went down in a heap. The bank had only the vault left standing, and there was nothing left of Dad's hardware but a chimney sticking up. After the fire, people stood around grinning at the awfulness of it. It made the headlines of the Tacoma paper, and we had a string of tourists.

Other than that, most fires were of a house, or a shed. The wooden houses would go up fast. It was usually at night. You'd hear the bell, get out of bed, and run to see the fire. That was the social thing to do. Once when my friend Henrietta was visiting me, the bell rang, and I said, "There's a fire. Come on!"

"Why? Are we in danger?"

"No, no. We have to go see it." If it was a shed, everybody looked to see if there were copper coils sticking up through the ashes, because that would be a still.

During Prohibition, bootleggers were going full tilt in the woods around Morton. In the woods, a man might rise up with a gun and tell you to go back. When bootleggers were caught, a lawyer in the county seat would get them off with light sentences. Prohibition didn't have the sympathy of the public.

I saw a still in 1924, when I was 19. One of my boyfriends told me some of the bootleggers were going to move it. He'd asked them if he could bring me to see it, and they'd said,

"C.B. Smith's daughter? Sure. He'd keep his mouth shut. Bring C.B. Smith, too." Dad didn't want to know anything about any stills. If he was going to have a drink, he wanted good whiskey, and he would have it only when he had a cold. Well, he was out of town.

The still was in a grove of maples. They had their mash in a tank made of fir planks. I looked in the open tank under the trees and said, "Caterpillars are dropping in it."

"Oh, that don't matter," the man said. A few leaves were OK, too. And one said, "It's good stuff. Look." He poured some on a stick and lit it, and it burned.

He said, "When we make a batch, we drive down the road, turn off into the woods and bury it. You know what some of them Morton kids done? They've learnt our tire tracks. They've followed the track and dug up the liquor." He was disgusted.

In Morton, people-watching was important. One of the most absorbing puzzles was to figure out who was having a baby.

"She's going to have a baby," someone would say.

"Noooooo!"

"Oh, yes. I can tell by the way she's wearing that apron. Look at the way she's pulling it back and forth."

Morton dealt with extramarital pregnancies in a different way from the silent movies. In the movies, you saw this sweet young girl who got pregnant — it wasn't clear *how* — and her father was ordering her out into the storm. *Shame! Shame! Shame!*

In Morton, unmarried girls often got pregnant. I sometimes knew it by the way Mother whispered: "The baby came a little too soon, didn't it? Seven months." Sometimes the new couple announced at about the fourth month that the baby was going to be premature. My mother would say: "How do they *know* that?"

One of the farm girls never had a boyfriend. She was homely, with straight red hair, freckles, skinny and awkward. Then she was going with a stranger, a man working on the road. Everybody was glad that she had a boyfriend, but there was always a little suspicion.

The man left, because it was a temporary job, and she developed what she said was a tumor. Did the women in town believe this? They certainly did not. Her sister asked if she was pregnant. No, no, she said, it was a tumor. Then she came to her sister one morning and said, "It isn't a tumor. I'm going to have a baby and I'm having *pains*." They got in a car and rushed her down the road. She had the baby in the next town, and came home with it.

Some time before, a World War I veteran, a stolid man maybe 20 years older, had wanted to go with her. She had rejected him; she had wanted somebody young and charming. Now he came forward. He went right to her house and offered marriage. She took him up on it. He treated her well, and she became an accepted member of the community.

The other case was a woman who was not so young, perhaps 22. This girl was going steady with a fellow, holding hands and dancing too close. People got suspicious. They were pretty knowing about the signs.

She went down to Portland to visit somebody. Then her folks said she married down there. She stayed a while, and

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Chavez Says

by Michael Owen

In Hugo's world, what's his is his, and
what's yours is his also.

I work for a live entertainment company that travels to different cities every week. It's a great way to see the world, and I take full advantage of my days off. But when I heard we were going to Caracas, Venezuela, I felt some anxiety about working, even temporarily, in a country run by the notorious anti-American dictator Hugo Chavez.

Venezuela is one of the more beautiful places I have visited. During our day off, a few of us rented a van and, protected by three hired security escorts, headed into the mountains to visit Colonia Tovar, a German town that dates back to the 1840s. The town was charming and the mountaintop views breathtaking. Speaking of beauty, the beaches in Venezuela are beautiful with blue water that allows the beachgoer to see straight to the bottom at depths of up to 12 feet. It's as clear as a swimming pool.

But Venezuela will not become a tourist powerhouse like Costa Rica or Panama — not soon, anyway. Despite huge revenues from oil exports, inflation is rampant. Electric power goes out regularly. Tourists do not leave their hotels without being escorted. We were not permitted to go anywhere without armed security guards, most of whom had been police officers before Mr. Chavez took over. They entered the pri-

vate sector because they didn't like where the government was headed.

Like Castro, Chavez has his share of supporters around the world. When I sarcastically posted on my Facebook page one of the many propaganda signs here, the nearly incredible "Your greatest investment is to pay your taxes," I was inundated with messages and comments applauding my forward-thinking, inspirational manifesto. One of the message writers told me that she had spent some time in Venezuela and was very impressed with the government micro-credit program that helps people start their own businesses. Apparently she hasn't actually done any business in Venezuela; otherwise, she would know that such enterprises as do start up are hit with a 56.6% tax on their profits.

The supposed good that Chavez has done reminds me of the musical "Evita," which portrays Juan and Eva Peron

handing out food and doing some good for poor people while embezzling millions and violating personal liberties. To quote a song from the play,

Now, critics claim a little of the cash has gone astray.
But that's not the point my friend,
When the money keeps rolling out you don't keep books;
You can tell you've done well by the happy grateful looks.
Accountants only slow things down, figures get in the way.

Back at the venue in Caracas, a red-vested government worker walked around the building and made sure that the prices on the food and merchandise we would sell at our show were those the government had permitted, ending his argument with "Chavez says." He told me that in his country all the money technically belongs to Hugo Chavez, and we're just borrowing it. At any time Chavez or his minions can tell you to empty your pockets and give him back his money. Imagine a country where the president or his representatives can walk up to you and say, "You have to give me all your money, because it's mine." (Hmmm. Maybe that's not so hard to imagine . . .)

Everywhere I turned people told me what I could or could not do, finishing each directive with "Chavez says." Government employees constantly invoke the name of their militant president; it's almost like saying "God bless you" after a sneeze. Chavez's name was even invoked for the purpose of restricting my movements in and around the building. I once responded, "I don't take my orders from Chavez, I take them from my supervisor"; to which the reply was, "We talked to your supervisor and he said to tell you what Chavez said." It was like playing "Simon Says" around the clock, and it was not fun at all.

Government involvement is overwhelming. Last year, when my company came to Venezuela, contractual agreements between my company and the government set the prices for our merchandise at an amount that seemed reasonable. After two shows it became apparent that demand was greater than expected, and if the company did not raise prices, the supply would run out. So with the government's consent, it raised the prices. By the end of the run, items that sell in the states for \$25 were selling for \$80 apiece, and the people

In Venezuela, all the money belongs to Chavez. At any time Chavez or his minions can tell you to give him back his money.

were still asking for more. This year we had negotiated to set our prices at last year's closing prices, and we stocked accordingly. Once we arrived and were settled into the building with all our stands set up, the government changed its mind. "Chavez said" that our prices needed to be cut in half. As a result, we were not sufficiently stocked, and we were completely sold out of everything, one day early. It's simple supply and demand, but if Chavez doesn't understand it, Chavez doesn't say.

So agents of the state spent a lot of time scrutinizing the Americans to make sure we were not "gouging" the custom-

ers — while the locals we hired were allowed to charge whatever they wanted for the merchandise we had to provide for them. We were forced to continue selling souvenirs for the government-mandated price of \$45, with the red vests breathing down our necks, while the locals down the concourse could charge \$50 and pocket an extra \$5 with every sale.

The anti-American sentiment in the Venezuelan government is palpable. The manager of the government-run building told our local security guys that she tries to do all she can to slow down our sales because she doesn't want Venezuelan money to fund an American company. "Yankee" is a derogatory term; when people are mad at each other in traffic, they call each other Yankees. One Sunday evening when I was trying to move some merchandise to a vendor's stand I was told, "Listen, Yankee, I don't care what you have to do, Chavez says it's illegal for *you* to use that dolly on the concourse during a show." When I tried to sidestep him he blocked my way and put a hand on my chest and said, "Yankee, you're not listening to me." Fortunately, another company worker, a man from Puerto Rico stepped in, and kept the situation from escalating into a fight. I'm a big guy, a foot taller than most of the Venezuelans, so I don't think it would have been me going to the hospital — but I've seen the hospitals in Venezuela and I can understand why Mr. Moore didn't use Venezuela in his feature-length film, "Sicko."

Later in the week, I needed to go outside to our storage trailers during the second act to get more merchandise for after the show, typically a big time for sales as customers leave the building. On the way up the ramp to return to the venue, I noticed that the door — the only one I could use for hauling merchandise — was closed. A person wearing a bright green security shirt was standing there, staring me down, and wouldn't you know it — he happened to be the same Yankee-hater from Sunday evening. I knew I was in trouble. He said, "You're not allowed to bring merchandise in and out of the building during the show." I responded, "When did that rule change?" He said, "Someone on the cameras just called me and said that you're not allowed back in until all the people at this show have left." The second act was about to end, so I quickly asked, "Why is that?" He responded, "For security reasons." I said, "Well, is it a good security practice to have me outside with the public milling around and thousands of dollars in merchandise outside as well, when you could just let me in now?"

I reminded myself that my friend from Puerto Rico had solved the dolly standoff by being calm. So I remained very calm. It didn't help. "Chavez says," Green Shirt replied with a leer. I had to sit outside the building with all of the merchandise and no protection, while customers inside the building complained that there was nothing to buy. Luckily, one of our security officers overheard what was going on and came out to help me keep an eye on over \$60,000 of merchandise, while the street vendors eyed it hungrily.

I saw some amazing graffiti in Venezuela. In one case, Uncle Sam is swinging a knife. Instead of the stars on his hat there are skulls, and his arm is labeled, "CIA." Chavez is dodging the knife and about to punch poor Uncle Sam. Another one shows a horde of demons labeled "CIA," and Chavez is about to step on them. This is education by the state.

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Preaching to the Unconverted

by Lori Heine

Do you care enough about your convictions
to try to convince others to share them, or would
you rather make pointless gestures?

Books abound on the social Right about how to talk to liberals – meaning, of course, not *classical* liberals but members of the “progressive” Left. Ann Coulter had a bestseller titled “How to Talk to a Liberal (If You Must).” Glenn Beck now has one out under the title “Arguing With Idiots: How to Stop Small Minds and Big Government.” Disdain for minions of the Left simply drips from their pens. Talking to such people, they make clear, is a chore: perhaps unavoidable, but highly unpleasant and best gotten over with as soon as possible.

If we view it as an onerous task, the fact is, we’ll resent it — and probably just end up in a fight. But fighting words don’t convince anybody. So we’ve talked to our idiot (“to” generally implying more “at” than “with”), feel our painful duty is done, and move on. We’ve probably only hardened him in whatever existing prejudices he may have had, but we feel better. We’ve done our duty, and reconfirmed the fact that these people simply won’t listen — or are too stupid to learn.

But if we approach it in that way, we *haven’t* done our duty. Not if we really care about our convictions enough to make any converts.

The wonderfully diverse realm of libertarians and near libertarians abounds with converted idiots. A great many of us, at one time, believed passionately in leftist ideals. As a mat-

ter of fact, we now proudly count, as some of our brightest minds, people who once ranked among the biggest “idiots.” We would do well not to shut our own minds to the possibility for even radical change.

I was one such “idiot.” As are many of my friends. Were I, with the smugness all too typical of many converts, merely to turn my back on them, I would leave them to languish in stupidity, perhaps forever. It is truly painful, now, to talk politics with those with whom I formerly agreed. But I care too much — not only about the beliefs I now hold, but about the people I’m talking with — to keep my back turned and simply walk away.

I understand why many on the Left hold the views that they do. And I recognize the reasons (largely personal, but some intellectual) why they think that way. In reasoning with those who disagree with us, we must speak a language other than the one in which we now prefer to converse. But we

remember that strange tongue, even if we would prefer to forget it; and we almost certainly retain some facility in it. The unpleasant but unavoidable fact is that if we don't go back and help a significant number of these folks to see the light, our cause is ultimately doomed to failure.

Our country is in too much trouble for us to take the easy way out. If we're content to wallow in our self-righteous comfort, leaving on the outside those who do not see things our way, we will never help to build the sort of enduring majority necessary to bring about the changes we desire — or, for that matter, to prevent the changes we wish to keep from happening. Whether we like it or not, there are just too many “idiots” who need to be converted if we are to save our country from being dragged down into an idiocy from which it cannot recover.

Their numbers are multiplying daily. Idiocy on the Right breeds more idiocy on the Left. As social-conservative statists on the Right ramp up their hysteria, it rises up on the Left, like a tsunami, in a nightmarish mirror-image. We must call the elected officials of our preferred party to strict account when they are tempted to exploit this. Surely no rational mind believes that the antidote for an epidemic of hysteria might be still more of it.

What we have, now, is a screaming-match between those who think all dissidents from the extreme religious Right should be locked up and those who urge us to do things for which we probably ought to be locked up. We're stuck in an asylum full of lunatics, and we want to break out. New populist voices are emerging: folks who realize that our founders left us a treasure, and who wish to preserve it. They are far less “extreme” than their critics would claim. But they are screaming, too — and amid such a cacophony of screams, it is difficult to distinguish the sane from the loony.

Somebody has to speak in a reasonable tone. “Don't Tread on Me” signs at tea parties are good reminders of the heritage libertarians desire to preserve. But once in a while, instead of marching and protesting, we must actually sit down with those who disagree with us and exchange ideas like adults. At the moment, that's not often being done.

We must, first of all, admit that big-government social “conservatives” do pursue a statist fantasy of their very own, and that it is no less dangerous than that dreamed up by “liberals.” In the battle now raging between statist visions, those

Whether we like it or not, there are just too many idiots who need to be converted if we are to save our country.

of us who believe in liberty — those who are both the real liberals and the real conservatives — are between a rock and a hard place. Statists of every stripe find it necessary to scream, to suppress, to resort to violence both verbal and rhetorical. A “soft answer” might not, as the Bible indicates, merely “turn away wrath.” It speaks in the voice of real reason — a voice in which may be heard the truth that finally resonates with sane minds on both sides. In the war between Left and Right, nei-

ther side can be expected to lay down its sword while threatened by that of the other. In reasoned conversation, many of my gay and lesbian friends reveal themselves to hold beliefs that are, essentially, quite conservative. But so long as people calling themselves “conservative” (and accepted as such by the lazy mainstream media) advocate criminalizing our relationships, as some still do, I have difficulty blaming these friends for seeking shelter on the Left. As poor a job of living up to their rhetoric as they may have done, modern liberals at least keep out of our bedrooms and refrain from demonizing us.

As a small businessperson, on the other hand, I view heavy taxes and insane big-government controls, advocated by the Left, as nothing but an attack on my ability to survive. When we seek refuge on the Left, we are supporting those who would take bread from our mouths by making it impossible for us to earn a decent living. Even though we are gay, we can't deny that we must eat and keep a roof over our heads, just like everybody else. Whichever statist path we choose, when we seek to protect our interests on one side, we are attacking them on the other.

Most of the conservatives with whom I actually converse are not antigay. But because of political correctness on the Right (which is as bad as the Left's version, though few will admit it), they are afraid to spread the word that gay people don't have horns or wield pitchforks. Expressing compassion and tolerance is taboo, so the only alternative to growling at us is keeping silent. They are alarmed at hateful rhetoric from others on their side, but they sit on their hands and say nothing, afraid of being tossed out of the club. Their fear of showing “weakness” is what weakens them in fact.

Were there one diabolical mind behind the destruction of our country, it would set us against each other exactly as the factionalists are doing now. Liberals are hardly the only ones who seem unaware of this. Many latter-day so-called conservatives are former liberals who developed their thinking (such as it is) in the contentious, childish, “me first” atmosphere of the Left. It is, indeed, as hard to reason with them as it is with many of their archrivals. If it's too difficult for them to talk to “idiots,” it may be because, in their eagerness to learn the language of the allies they've since chosen, they have forgotten their mother tongue.

The divide-and-conquer strategy is favored by those who would grab power over others because division is naturally a source of distraction. It keeps us busy thinking about how horrible the other side is instead of what our would-be lords and masters want to do to us all. The temptation to work our will on those we dislike is dangled before us. We don't realize that while working our will we have lost our freedom — until it is too late. The fantasy of tyrannizing others seems a juicy plum, but when we bite into it, it turns to dust.

Conservatives used to understand this. They can speak sensibly to no one until they remember how easy, for instance, it was for them to support government intervention in education, until they realized that it often resulted in their own views being outlawed from the schools.

At gatherings with family and friends, we can relate to the conflicts that conservatives feel by sharing our own. Most people's opinions change over time; ours have, theirs have or can, too. We can invite along friends with whom they may not

ordinarily associate, to give them a firsthand experience with people they may fear or dislike but really just don't know. Once some of my loved ones found out I was gay, they realized they couldn't hate faceless "others" any more because some of us had faces they knew. The same thing may be done by former liberals or conservatives who come out of the closet to those who know them best and admit that they are libertarians.

Closeted libertarians deprive the world of much needed light. When I told my friends, this Christmas, that I was now a libertarian, they looked at me as if I had just landed from Saturn. I had to share with them the reasons for my changed outlook, and since they knew much of my story, they could relate to me. Since I was familiar with their own lives, it was easy for me to point out ways in which government intrusion was costing them more money, making their work harder, and perhaps even keeping them from getting jobs. We all need medical care we can't afford, and as one who spent 30 years in the insurance industry, I was uniquely able to steer them away from scapegoating "evil insurance companies" for ills actually caused by government interference.

I told them that libertarianism, far from being some new

wacko notion, is the set of principles upon which our country was founded; that the reason for their confusion over whether I was "Right" or "Left" wasn't my own incoherence but the fact that libertarianism was the fertile soil from which both modern Right and Left have grown. They knew me, and they recognized the glimmer of wisdom in what I was saying. For my part, I knew they weren't really idiots, whatever some might call them, and I respected them enough to reason with them.

It is becoming clear that unless most of us return to thinking of ourselves as rights-seeking Americans foremost and only thereafter members of whichever political "club" we prefer, our country will not survive. That is the lesson I have learned from beholding the mayhem of current American politics, from sea to shining sea. I must put my partial interests as a gay person, as a business owner, and as everything else I may be second to those of the nation as a whole and its full set of liberties.

Political factions, each with its separate language and demands, will tear this country apart, just as our founders warned they would. Never before has it been so urgent that we stop them. □

Marketing Morality, *from page 28*

attractive ethical system it could be expected to attract repeat customers and to grow. Superior systems — systems that are more successful at meeting consumers' needs — will be reproduced. Inferior ones will die out. Better ways of handling cases will be sought, successes added and failures dropped, and the systems themselves will advance in something of the same way as science advances.

Karl Popper, the distinguished philosopher of science, emphasized the idea that scientific hypotheses are presented for testing and possible falsification. The free market has something that is comparable — in its effects, at least — to falsification. It's called profitability. Businesses are tested in the marketplace and survive only if they make a profit. Ethical systems can be tested in that way, too. Those that meet the requirements of the market will survive and try to enhance

their ability to keep surviving.

It must be remembered, however, that an ethical system cannot be tested like a proposition in physics. Ethical systems are judged in accordance with people's values. An ethical system that many might find reasonable today would have found few customers in the Dark Ages. People's beliefs are essential in the discussion of human action, and change over time. An ethical system introduced into the market "before its time" may fail, only to be rediscovered and successfully retrieved later on.

Yet if the state were to stop monopolizing the justice market, various ethical systems could flourish, some succeeding (generating profits) and some failing (generating losses). Through this system of competition, inferior systems could be weeded out and superior systems discovered. □

The View From Lulu's, *from page 30*

For months, I have been trying to devise a sociologically valid taxonomy of beverage choices. It's tough going. The green tea drinkers are probably followers of Buddhist mysticism, and hypochondriacs to boot. The *chai* drinkers would like to travel; they are sure they love India because they have never been there. Once, I forced my brother-in-law, a tea trader visiting from Calcutta to taste Lulu's *chai*. He told me that what we call "chai" in America, "tea" in most Indian languages, is a good beverage for those allergic to tea.

You can tell the hardline leftists by the fact that they load every beverage with prodigious amounts of sugar, or often, of honey. (Self-indulgence has a way of asserting itself.) I can't figure out those men who order espresso or complicated Italianate coffee drinks. Raspberry latte? *Menthe* mocha? The retail employees on high heels, with perilously brief skirts, make chi-chi selections, of course. But so do the short-haired women in thick boots and longshoreman clothing.

Hot honey and milk is probably for those who coddle their inner child. I can't begin to tell you how many are hairy, 200 pound, rugged-looking guys. The presence of soy milk on the menu is not surprising though: it's the politically correct accompaniment to organically grown Fair Trade coffee.

The drinkers of regular coffee are probably solid citizens who ended up in Santa Cruz by happenstance. I suspect they have regular jobs and pay regular taxes; the brew helps them stay regular. A few might be closet conservatives. You never know!

I have been marveling at a classificatory mystery: Lulu's offers, simultaneously, *café latte*, *café con leche*, and *café au lait*. I believe the three sets of words mean exactly the same thing. I could try each concoction in turn of course, in the spirit of scientific experimentation. I refrain because I am charmed by the reliable spectacle of three perfectly parallel universes neatly delineated by three mutually intelligible languages. □

Obamalaise, from page 24

repeated promises during the campaign that he wouldn't raise taxes on such families "by one dime."

To summarize: Obama's policies in office look like a bizarre mishmash of the worst policies of Hoover and FDR at the onset of the Great Depression. Take Hoover's foolish idea to raise taxes in a severe recession and his acceptance of Smoot-Hawley protectionism, add FDR's endless jeremiads against big business, his soak-the-rich taxes, and his Keynesian spending schemes, and — behold! — you have Obamaism.

But Obamalaise is not the product simply of Obama's anti-business, pro-big-government policies. It is tied to his character, a character with deceitfulness at its core. He has lied on more matters more often than any other president I can recall. People have fun writing columns enumerating his lies. I wrote one last year listing six howlers (Orange County Register, Oct. 9). A recent article by John Ellis (FrontPageMagazine.com, Jan. 21) lists 30 major lies, and he admits that it is not exhaustive. Here is just a partial list of Obama's major deceptions (equivocations, lies, broken promises, and flip-flopped policies). Consider their size and number.

- After bashing Bush for a \$498 billion deficit, Obama ran a \$1.5 trillion deficit, to be followed by a \$1.6 trillion deficit, and then trillion-dollar deficits going forward.
- Obama campaigned promising to protect Medicare from cuts, but then proposed half a trillion bucks worth of them in his healthcare "reform."
- Obama pretended that he understood why whites resented never-ending racial quotas aimed at them, but appointed the most unapologetic quota queen he could to the Supreme Court.
- Obama bashed Bush for not spending enough for manned space exploration, but he cut it altogether in his new budget.
- Obama promised that his stimulus bill would stop unemployment from going above 8%, and that most of the jobs created would be in the private sector, but the rate went above 10% and most of the jobs created are in government.
- Obama pretended to agree with McCain about the evils of pork-barrel spending, and promised to veto every pork-barrel bill, before signing a bill containing 9,000 pork-barrel projects.
- Obama repeatedly promised that all negotiations on healthcare would be completely transparent, indeed, would be broadcast on C-SPAN, but had nothing but closed door hearings with only Democrats present in the crafting of the legislation.
- On other areas as well, Obama promised greater transparency, but rammed through controversial bills with little discussion.
- During his campaign, Obama asserted that he opposed a single-payer system, but he had in fact repeatedly called for it in prior years; then he pushed for a public option that would crowd out private carriers, resulting in a de facto single-payer system.
- Obama promised not to hire lobbyists, but wound up employing massive numbers of them.
- Obama promised to abide by the campaign finance reform law funding limits that he himself had supported, but broke his pledge (and outspent McCain, \$600 million to \$300 million).
- Obama constantly said that if people liked their healthcare provider, they could keep it, but his bill would have limited that privilege to people currently insured, ending it if they changed providers; it also had built-in incentives that would have led employers to drop private coverage and use the public option.
- Obama promised to stop the practice of introducing bills so long that people couldn't read or discuss them, but he has introduced bills of record length (witness the health bill at 2,000 pages).
- Obama promised a new era of bipartisanship, but he froze the Republicans in Congress out of negotiations on important bills and bashed his Republican predecessor every chance he could find.
- After bashing McCain, both in debates and in tens of millions of dollars worth of ads, for his willingness to tax healthcare benefits provided by employers, Obama proposed a health bill constructed on the basis of that tax proposal.
- Obama promised to close Gitmo. It remains open.
- After promising in his campaign against McCain that he would open up domestic drilling, he did the reverse, bringing new regulations to block exploration on public lands.
- After heatedly denying that his healthcare proposals would fund premiums for illegal aliens, he persistently blocked attempts to spell that out clearly in the bill he pushed.
- After promising when pitching his healthcare bill that it wouldn't raise premiums, he insisted that the bill require insurance carriers to cover people with



"I'm going to be honest about this — I'm from the government, and I'm here to bamboozle you."

preexisting conditions, which could do nothing but raise premiums.

This pattern of lies did not result from accident or coincidence.

Ellis rightly notes that most other politicians known for their lies have been trying to protect themselves from scandal (Clinton's adultery, Nixon's abuse of power), or just "to make themselves look good"; but Obama lies about everything. He employs deceit as a standard tool. This bespeaks a man false to his core — a man lost in a state of metaphysical mendacity in which one can say anything one likes to manipulate others.

Given the prevalence of news media that, as Ellis observes,

are unwilling to hold this president to account for his array of untruths — as they held Nixon to account for his lies, Bush the elder to account for breaking his tax pledge, and Bush the younger to account for the nonexistent weapons of mass destruction — it is no surprise that Obama has lied so blatantly. But this has not escaped the notice of the public, and it frightens them, for it tells them they have no idea what he really wants or intends.

In short, there is a growing awareness among Americans that their president is economically ignorant, politically radical, deeply duplicitous, and totally untrustworthy. This is the cause of Obamalaise. □

Reflections, from page 22

in that year or now. If so, 1898–99 was extreme; perhaps the earth was experiencing climate change back then. Or maybe the typical levels were similar to those of 1898–99, only slightly lower, in which case neither that year nor this year is all that unusual; ergo, no climate change either then or now.

So the alarmists' argument fails on at least three counts: as an assertion with no specific content (the vague "extreme events"); as an unfalsifiable assertion (one for which no evidence would be acceptable as disproving the assertion); and as an assertion that almost certainly contradicts itself and the historic record in one way or another.

— John Kannarr

Preventative care — Being a Canadian who lived in the States for over 10 years, I have experience with both socialized medicine and the so-called private system down under. (I say "so-called" because the American medical system is not private but almost entirely controlled and defined by government. Americans would do well to stop focusing their fear on socialized medicine and realize that it is government control — whatever form the control takes — that's the problem.)

Needless to say, I have ideological and political objections to both systems. Putting such objections aside, however, my experience with socialized medicine is that it delivers good 1960s care. A flu shot here, a blood test there, a yearly check-up when I remember . . . I don't have substantive complaints about the quality of my medical treatment; but, then, I don't make substantial demands either.

I am lucky enough to have a decent doctor. Although doctors are not assigned, they are in such short supply — even in our area, which is an hour or so outside Toronto — that many people cannot find a nearby one who will accept them as regular patients. Those without a regular doctor must rely on open clinics to receive basic care. My husband and I became "regular" patients when a neighbor died of a lingering disease and the widow suggested our names to the doctor. I guess he reckoned that two healthy people equaled one high-maintenance patient, so he took us both on. His office is about five miles from our front door.

Problems arise when we want something more than

1960s care. For example, I tore my rotator cuff a few years ago and needed an MRI. In the States, I could have received one the next day; up here, the wait was 6 months. My dog could have been scheduled for the next day; one way hospitals have of attracting extra funds is renting MRI time to vets. I remember being reassured by the possibility of heading south of the border if my shoulder became too painful.

As the States drifts toward socialization, Canada is slowly moving in the opposite direction. I live in Ontario, but if I lived in the neighboring province of Quebec, I would be able to pay for private care, which exists in parallel with the socialized system. Even in Ontario, pieces of the jigsaw puzzle are being privatized. Dental care was always at the user's expense, but a few years ago optometry and several other areas became largely user-paid. (There are exceptions, such as the elderly.)

My hunch: the "socialized" medicine that is likely to occur in the States will be much worse than what exists up here. This is not a pro-Canada perspective but a realistic appraisal of the miserable patchwork of vested interests and politics that has gone into the process down under. The medical system up here may be politically and otherwise wretched, but it is "simple" compared to the 2,700 pages of the healthcare bill that is being proposed as a preliminary step toward socialized medicine for the States.

— Wendy McElroy

Gone fishin' — Recently, the U.S. Department of Justice subpoenaed Philadelphia-based Indymedia.us, a news aggregation website, to hand over records of "all IP traffic to and from" the site on one day in June 2008 and to include "IP addresses, times, and any other identifying information" — physical addresses, Social Security Numbers, bank account numbers, credit card numbers, etc. — of the site's readers. More troubling still, the Feds' subpoena ordered the site's proprietors "not to disclose the existence of this request" unless authorized to do so by the Justice Department.

This wasn't political harassment of some fringy anti-Obama group. The site in question is run by the Independent Media Center, a group of journalists and self-described left-leaning activists whose mission statement includes "promoting social and economic justice" and "social change." The group is generally supportive of the Obama administration.

The site's tech people — largely volunteers — contacted the San Francisco-based Electronic Frontier Foundation for help in making a response. EFF lawyers pointed out that, under Justice Department guidelines, subpoenas to members of the media are supposed to receive special treatment. Excerpts from the guidelines include the stipulation that "no subpoena may be issued to any member of the news media" without "the express authorization of the attorney general" and such subpoenas should be "directed at material information regarding a limited subject matter." The EFF lawyers also noted that, in addition to violating the special guidelines, the Indymedia.us subpoena had a number of specific flaws in drafting and delivery.

The Feds replied with a one-sentence letter stating that the subpoena had been withdrawn.

Around the same time, assistant U.S. attorneys who'd made contact with the Indymedia.us technicians said that the techs could face prosecution for obstruction of justice if they disclosed the existence of the withdrawn subpoena. The Feds said, cryptically, that any such talk "may endanger someone's health" or have a "human cost." EFF lawyers asked for elaboration on these statements . . . but the Feds didn't respond.

One of the EFF lawyers said that quick withdrawal and hasty retreat into silence were increasingly typical of federal prosecutors. However, "this is the first time we've seen them try to get the IP address of *everyone* who visited a particular site."

Who knows where the Justice Department's next fishing expedition will take them?
— Jim Walsh

The mildly pleasant skies — Flying out of Phoenix recently, crawling through a long line at the Southwest ticket counter, I happened to hear the following statement by a cheery female voice on the airport speaker system: "Welcome to Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport, the friendliest airport in the United States."

Is it just me, or is this a very low bar — something that one should not be bragging about, something like claiming to be the most capitalistic politician in Cuba?
— Ted Levy

Brevity, brevity — In "Walden," Henry David Thoreau offered the following advice: "Simplify, simplify." Am I the only one who thinks he should have just written "simplify"?
— Wendy McElroy

Alverna's World: A Small Town in 1920, *from page 34*

came back with the baby — but no husband. It was printed in the paper that her mother announced that her daughter had married this man. When people asked the editor about it, he said, "I print what they tell me, like any other news I have."

Nobody ever saw the husband. There were stories that he was sent on a job, and he got hurt, and he was delayed. He just never showed up. She raised the child, got a job as a telephone operator, and finally announced she was divorced. Nobody knew how she got the divorce. The town didn't believe it, but they accepted it. She was married and divorced and had a child. That was respectable.

Abortion was illegal then, but also available.

In 1932 my younger sister met the man she wanted to marry. In two weeks' time, they were engaged. Being conscientious, she felt she had to confess that she was not a virgin. This made it easy for him to persuade her to have relations. He borrowed our car and got her pregnant in it. They didn't have money for a motel room. And within the first month, she was pregnant.

She went to my older sister first, and from her she got an abortion pill. It didn't work. She had no money, her fiancé had no money, and the sister had no money. And they weren't going to go to Mother and Dad — that was the last thing. They

came to me. An abortion done by a doctor cost \$50. And it was a good thing she went to a doctor, because the fetus had died, and it hadn't passed. There was never any regret expressed about the abortion. It was just something that had to be done.

Mother found out about it, but she mentioned it to me only once. She disapproved, but she wasn't going to disown her daughter over it, and Dad wouldn't have, either. He never said a word about it.

So these girls were not cast out, either by society or by their parents. The movies always showed that sin was punished. In Morton, it was overlooked.



Such was my aunt's world. In some respects it was a better one. It did not require a city permit to cut down a tree in one's yard, as mine does, or a city permit to own a dog or a cat. It was not trying to end poverty by subsidizing it, and except for the two years 1917–1918, it accepted no responsibility for policing the world. Yet this small town had ways of policing itself, not all of them pleasant or healthy. The town was nosy and gossipy, and closed in many ways. Alverna and all of her brothers and sisters left it in their teens and early 20s, and none of their descendants lives there today. □

Chavez Says, *from page 36*

Billboards filled with propaganda serve to keep the people in line. Some of my favorites:

Science leads to Socialism.

With Chavez, the people are the government.

In Socialism, you do the greatest works.

Socialism, Patriotism or Death!

This may sound silly enough. But the problem is that Chavez, like Hitler, Stalin, and Mao before him, has mastered

the art of propaganda. He knows how to make his propaganda look as if it were grassroots. When people think that their neighbors are going along with the powers that be — for instance, by painting pro-Chavez graffiti in their neighborhoods — then they themselves are afraid to rebel. That is why most people you meet in Venezuela are afraid to speak against Mr. Chavez and his ilk. But I would like to think that the Venezuelans will one day learn the slogan "Live free or die!" □

Reviews

"The Next 100 Years: A Forecast for the 21st Century," by George Friedman. Doubleday, 2009, 253 pages.

The Shape of Things to Come

Robert Chatfield

George Friedman is the leader of a strategic thinktank that forecasts macro-global trends for governments and Fortune 500 companies. He tries to take a long view of so-called "geopolitical" trends in order to forecast likely political alliances and their effects. But while predictions of particular events add color to his book, the goal is to forecast general trends, as if he were summarizing a 100-year game of chess or, perhaps more aptly, the classic war game Risk.

Overarching trends include aging populations of developed nations, the slowdown in population growth worldwide, the pace of technological innovation and — most important — the influences of geography and history that have created the present political landscape. Among his more provocative arguments, Friedman makes a compelling case that Russia will continue to decline as a world power and suggests, from cogent historical evidence, that China will continue to be a fractious society that is too large to manage.

Friedman's central prediction may be good news for Americans — although some of his assumptions are bad news for the individual freedom that Americans prize. He begins with the assertion that each country has a "grand strategy." Much as individuals pursue activities that are in their best interest, countries try to maximize their political and economic positions. One problem with this personification of a 21st century "manifest destiny" is that it seems to sanction the ability of political leaders to control the populace for the benefit of the "grand strategy." Already, technological advancements in weapons, surveillance, and payments systems appear to be leading the world toward a command-and-control society, not one based on individual freedom.

Nevertheless, by examining historical trends and alliances, Friedman provides a strong argument that the United States is only in its adolescent stage as a world power, while the importance of Western Europe continues to wane. The United States will continue to be dominant, since no other country will be able

to develop substantial naval power to challenge the American position in the Atlantic or Pacific Oceans. The next frontier essential for military control will be space, and the author predicts U.S. dominance in that sphere as well. No argument here. One look at the U.S. position in telecommunications, satellites, and the cost involved with initiating a space program, and very few serious contenders emerge. Though President Obama is cutting certain features of the space program, major advances with regard to private space travel have resulted from American investments, such as the X Prize Foundation, Burt Rutan's SpaceShipOne, and startup companies such as XCOR Aerospace.

While the author provides a guess that Turkey, Poland, and Japan will become the main players in geopolitics by the mid-21st century, the key to America's continuing dominance will be its relationship with Mexico. Mexico, he claims, greatly resembles the United States in the 1930s. At some point we can expect Mexico's problem with organized crime to diminish. The bigger issue will become inward and outward

migration across the southwest U.S. border. Given Mexico's increasing population of young people, it doesn't take a genius to predict that by the 2030s massive immigration will be exploited to support Social Security, Medicare, and whatever other social programs the United States continues to expand at the expense of individual responsibility. Friedman believes that the southwestern states are very likely to return to Mexican control at some point in the next 100 years, possibly as a result of politicians of Mexican descent serving in the U.S. Congress.

Many of Friedman's scenarios are plausible. Yet he pays little attention to several factors that could affect peace, liberty, and economic prosperity.

First, the idea that each country has a "grand strategy" oozes testosterone. There is very little heed for the female viewpoint here; the only real mention of women's role in society has to do with traditional versus nontraditional family structures. Yet throughout the developed nations, women play an increasingly important role in politics.

Second, considering the author's contention that history plays a significant role in predicting the future, there is surprisingly little mention of the historical influence of religion. Much of what has shaped geopolitics over the past 2,000 years has been the result of the spread of religion. The author predicts that the battle between the United States and Islamic jihadists will be short-lived, but he provides no reason before he quickly drops the subject, other than to predict that Turkey will be Islam's geopolitical world center.

Third, many areas of the world are sparsely mentioned or completely omitted in Friedman's presentation. Canada, Australia, and India barely merit notice; there is no discussion of Africa; and the Middle East is somehow regarded as nearly insignificant. Friedman pays a good deal of attention to emerging stock markets and economies, but it hardly seems likely — as Friedman's book implies — that three of the four BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) will fail to be important political forces during the next 100 years. Only Brazil merits his attention as a potential world power, and even then not until the mid-2050s.

Friedman's book is an American-

centric application of game theory, emphasizing what the United States needs to do if it is to survive and prosper in the 21st century. As I read it, I had the recurring thought that there is probably someone in Russia creating his own

hundred-year plan. And if, as Friedman suggests, Russia is indeed declining as a world power, it will likely try some unorthodox move to keep itself in the game. The last time I looked, Russia still had a few good chess players. □

"The Cartel," directed by Bob Bowden. Moving Picture Institute, 2009, 90 minutes.

Why Jonny Cant Reed

Gary Jason

Playing recently in film festivals is a powerful and provocative documentary about the sorry state of American education. The film, called "The Cartel," is also available for a modest donation to the estimable Moving Picture Institute.

Written, directed, and produced by Bob Bowden, "The Cartel" explores the many problems of the New Jersey public school system. Bowden is a reporter and news-anchor in New Jersey, so he is very familiar with state news and politics. The film has caused quite a stir, prompting attacks from the New Jersey Educational Association (NJEA) in particular. This highly organized and powerful group of rentseekers called it "an orchestrated attack against public schools and the New Jersey Educational Association."

But the film has also garnered considerable grassroots audience support, winning "Best of the Festival" at its debut at the 2009 Hoboken International Film Festival.

The film asks the pertinent question, "How has the richest and most innovative society on earth suddenly lost the ability to teach its children at a level that other modern countries consider 'basic'?" It is unabashed in pointing to school choice — as opposed to end-

lessly increasing public school funding — as the solution.

The movie starts with well-known political commentators from Right to Left saying that the American public school system is in crisis. It reviews the dismal performance of American students on both international and U.S. tests. For example, only 23% of American high-school students score a "proficient" in math. We fall below two dozen other countries, including many that are considerably poorer than we are. But we outspend all other countries by far. The top spending state is New Jersey, where only 39% of eighth graders are "proficient" in math, and only 40% in reading.

Bowden conducts man-on-the-street interviews revealing that the average New Jersey residents grossly underestimate the true amount their state spends per classroom. Average folk estimate it at about \$80,000; in reality it ranges from \$300,000 to nearly \$450,000.

Teachers in New Jersey average about \$55,000 in annual pay, so the waste incurred by overhead expenses is enormous. Many school custodians earn six-figure incomes. In Newark, over 400 administrators earn over \$100,000 per year. At one high school (Malcolm X. Shabazz High School), the school district spent \$30 million on an

athletic field. One administrator got a \$700,000 severance package on top of an annual retirement pension of \$120,000. Another fellow received nearly a half million dollars when he was fired.

New Jersey school districts are typically bloated with huge numbers of staff. One cute part of the movie involves sending the camera to administrators' parking lots and counting the Mercedes, Lexus, and other luxury cars in each.

Corruption is rampant as well. The movie explores the Schools Construction Corporation, a state outfit established to build schools, and notes that a billion dollars disappeared shortly after its creation. We see a parade of headlines about endless school corruption, including numerous school board members busted for taking bribes.

The NJEA runs numerous ads boasting about how well teachers and schools are doing; this film rebuts that boast. One damaging statistic: during a four-year period, only one of 3,850 tenured teachers — 0.03%! — was fired. This leads to the funniest moment in the film, an interview with the president of the NJEA, Joyce Powell, in which she smarmily denies that her union protects the incompetent. When asked if it was believable that 99.97% of all teachers were doing a good job, she says that not only is that correct, but it is a fact that should be celebrated.

The film also discusses the extensive patronage system, with administrators related to other administrators in a giant, swirling morass of cronyism.

What to do? Bowden does an outstanding job explaining the voucher system, and other forms of school choice such as charter schools. He interviews several articulate proponents of choice, such as Clint Bolick, former president of the Alliance for School Choice; Chester Finn, the much published advocate of school reform; and Gerard Robinson, president of the Black Alliance for Educational Options. He also shows how unions have systematically opposed and frustrated school choice. For example, the union-controlled Department of Education denied 21 of 22 recent applications for charter schools, including one rejected on transparently flimsy grounds.

The discussion of charter schools provides the most moving part of the

film. We witness a lottery in which parents and their children wait to find out whether they are among the lucky few to be liberated from the regular schools by being selected for a charter school. We see the tears of joy and prayers of thanks of those accepted, and the bitter tears of disappointment of those

who aren't. When you watch the disappointed lottery participants' faces, and compare their expressions with the asinine, complacent smirk on NJEA president Powell's face as she says how great the public schools are, you are likely to feel physically ill.

Don't miss this tremendous film. □

"House of Numbers," directed by Brent Leung. Knowledge Matters Productions, 2009, 90 minutes.

"The Origin, Persistence and Failings of HIV/AIDS Theory," by Henry H. Bauer. McFarland, 2007, 282 pages.

"Science Sold Out: Does HIV Really Cause AIDS?" by Rebecca Culshaw. North Atlantic Books, 2007, 96 pages.

Viral Marketing

Patrick Quealy

There are people who believe that everything scientists and doctors think they know about HIV is wrong. They include scientists, doctors, journalists, activists, HIV-positive people, and people with AIDS. Orthodox researchers take offense at what they perceive as the callous propagation of irresponsible views by these skeptics, dissidents, or (to their most passionate critics) "deniers" of HIV.

The line between a loony skeptic and a reputable dissenter may be blurry. One of the HIV skeptics won the Nobel Prize in Chemistry for developing a key technology used in HIV testing. It was one of the most important biomedical discoveries of the 20th century. One of the HIV skeptics believes he may have been abducted by aliens who spoke to him in the form of a glowing raccoon. These are the same person.

In January, I watched "House of Numbers," a documentary about the

AIDS causation controversy that toured the film festival circuit last year and is playing serially at theaters in a small number of cities. After the opening-night screening that I saw in Portland, Oregon, director Brent Leung held a question-and-answer session.

Leung isn't a typical HIV-AIDS dissenter. He doesn't claim to be better educated about AIDS than any other nonscientist who has researched AIDS. He says his film was meant to raise questions that aren't being talked about enough, and that it succeeded in doing so, even for the director himself. He doesn't accept the label "denialist," not only because he thinks it's unnecessarily emotional and unkind — intended, of course, to evoke Holocaust denialism — but because he puts himself forward (when discussing the film, if not when narrating it) as a searcher and an HIV agnostic, without definite beliefs.

The aspect of AIDS reappraisal most important to him is what he says are the many problems with HIV testing,

a grievance not without merit. The camera follows him through the process of being tested for HIV in South Africa. This, and the interviews with Luc Montagnier and his co-laureate, famous for their AIDS research, may be the two most important parts of the film. Skeptics other than Leung talk about confusing testing standards, but

There's no question that conditions other than HIV infection can lead to something that looks a lot like AIDS.

he shows them in living color. He asks questions of a woman who interviews him about his risk factors ("Tell me about your sex life!") and another who processes his test and determines the results. What they say does not summon all HIV testing into question, but it could lead to legitimate questions about the tests and about the practice of medicine.

"House of Numbers" is a good overview of recurring themes in the skeptics' books. Last year, I read two of the most recent contributions to the skeptical literature: one by Barbara Culshaw, a mathematical biologist whose background is in modeling HIV epidemiology; the other by Henry Bauer, a retired professor of chemistry at Virginia Tech.

As skeptical books go, Culshaw's "Science Sold Out" isn't bad. Culshaw describes how her work in HIV epidemiology led her to question received wisdom about HIV, then surveys the objections other dissidents have raised. She packs a useful overview of the skeptics' arguments into fewer than 100 pages.

The thing is, "as skeptical books go," isn't saying much. In content, structure, and prose style, "Science Sold Out" is like a lengthy blog post. It is in good company: several skeptics present themselves like the kid who just discovered cold fusion in his science fair project and has to show you *right now*. Gary Null's "AIDS: A Second Opinion" (2001) is unfocused. Celia Farber's "Serious Adverse Events" (2006) is courageous journalism and engaging reading, but it's unpolished and leaves the reader

wanting a more thorough understanding of AIDS science to justify her earnest tone. Peter Duesberg's touchstone "Inventing the AIDS Virus" (1996), while thorough, is in places overly simplistic or too anecdotal, straining the reader's impression of his intellectual honesty. Harvey Bialy's science-heavy biography of Duesberg ("Oncogenes, Aneuploidy, and AIDS," 2004) is a little sloppy and unapologetically cheerleading, and has some of the same weaknesses as Duesberg's book.

This is the biggest point on which Bauer's book shines. "The Origin, Persistence, and Failings of HIV/AIDS Theory" is the first of the skeptic books I have read in which not only is the science, as far as I can tell, reasonably sound, but the book is of high quality. It is well-written in a professional style, well-edited, documented with copious references, and follows a clear narrative progression through a wide-ranging discussion. The skeptics have badly needed a book that reads like a scientist's work, not like a screed banded out in a few weeks by a cranky lab technician or a strung-out antiestablishment reporter. They finally have that book.

The first part reads like a mystery. Bauer asks questions about what he says are inconsistencies in the HIV theory, then proposes a hypothesis that would explain them. His work is clearly the product of rational analysis by a scientific mind — something that is beyond the ken of many of the researchers disgorged from institutions of higher learning and into the HIV research machine. You'd have to be an expert in retroviruses or already have a dogmatic set of beliefs about HIV not to come away from this book with more questions than you'd had before.

The second part is about the progress of science (with nods to Thomas Kuhn and Karl Popper); the third is a scientific and political history of AIDS. I expected these parts to sound like filler, but they didn't. They're much less technical than the beginning of the book, but Bauer is equally comfortable, and equally convincing, in discussing data or in discussing scientific principles.

The models we have available and the words we use to describe a phenomenon shape our thinking about it. Bauer refers throughout his book to "F(HIV)," by which he means "the

frequency of positive HIV tests" (p. 5) rather than "the number of people who are HIV positive." He refuses to grant the premise that a virus that we can call HIV is actually detected by "HIV" tests. His terminology makes his argument straightforward by keeping the terms of discussion clear. Such epistemological rigor is a sign of a careful thinker and a good scientist, and is not the norm in science journalism in the mainstream press.

It's not widely known that there is an HIV-skeptic movement at all, but it's even less widely known is that it is not monolithic. Worse, among those who know about HIV skepticism, there's an unfortunate tendency to view the disagreement in black-and-white terms: either HIV is a dangerous virus that, if contracted, always leads to AIDS and eventual death; or else HIV is harmless. But it doesn't take much investigation to discover that important truths may lie between these stereotyped extremes.

There's no question that conditions other than HIV infection can lead to something that looks a lot like AIDS. The skeptics regard this as important information and at least the beginning of an important discussion. Even granting that HIV exists and (with or without cofactors) usually leads to development of immunodeficiency, AIDS is a hodgepodge of symptoms rather than a well-defined disease. This is not to say people with AIDS aren't really sick, but that just because two sick people are said to have the same disease doesn't mean that they do.

There are other conditions for which "disease" is a less than ideal metaphor, and about which it is more socially acceptable to say so than with AIDS. Alcoholism, attention deficit disorder, and homosexuality are examples. Anybody who shows up at a meeting and says he is an addict is considered an addict. Any child who doesn't like to sit still in a desk for eight hours is a candidate for being fed Adderall. Homosexuality stopped being a disease one day in 1973, when a resolution got a sufficient number of votes at a meeting of the American Psychiatric Association. Within a generation, mental-health practitioners went from believing almost uniformly that homosexuality was an illness to believing almost uniformly that gay people are healthy. As

a gay man, I'm happy about the change, but I acknowledge that it was political, not scientific — as was the decision to declare homosexuality an illness in the first place. Considering the widespread perception of AIDS as a disease limited to a few populations, gay men among them, the terms of the AIDS causation debate are uncomfortably homologous to those of the prior controversy about homosexuality. AIDS is at least as much a political definition as a medical one.

The skeptics point out that HIV was not exactly determined to be the cause of AIDS by careful research and

exchange of ideas in peer-reviewed journals. Increasingly vocal gay activists were lobbying the Reagan administration to take AIDS more seriously, so in 1984, Reagan's Health and Human Services secretary hastily convened a press conference and announced that "the probable cause of AIDS has been found." *Probable*. Standing next to her at the podium was Robert Gallo, the scientist whose name would appear on four papers published in *Science* the same year that are still cited as establishing HIV's causal role in AIDS. They are suggestive but not conclusive for such

a strong claim. That year, only 3.4% of citations of one of those papers implied or stated that it conclusively established that HIV causes AIDS. Two years later, that percentage had risen to 62.0%, though little had happened to bolster the claims of the paper on its own merits (see Steven Epstein, "Impure Science." University of California Press, 1996, 82–87). "HIV causes AIDS" was repeated often enough and became more and more the conventional wisdom.

Duesberg, the best known dissenter, argues that AIDS is attributable mostly to antiretroviral and recreational drugs. He believes long-term drug abuse gives some people AIDS, and toxic drugs used to treat HIV actually cause or worsen AIDS symptoms. To some extent, he is correct. Abusing drugs can make you sick, and the list of side effects of AIDS drugs is sickeningly long. The question is whether the entirety of AIDS, or only a portion of it, can be explained by the use of drugs.

Other skeptics, notably the "Perth Group" led by Eleni Papadopoulos-Eleopoulos, deny that HIV has been proven to exist at all. Bauer falls closest to this view. Leung's professed HIV agnosticism notwithstanding, so, I think, does he.

A third view receives little attention and is virtually unknown except to specialists and skeptics — astonishingly so, because it is hardly exclusive to skeptics. It is the view of the most important part, and arguably the most respected part, of the HIV-AIDS establishment. This view is that HIV, without cofactors (such as other pathogens, illness, or malnutrition), is relatively unlikely or unable to lead to development of AIDS.

The most visible exponent of this view is Luc Montagnier, the man who discovered HIV, for which he was awarded the 2008 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine. Montagnier's French research team and Bob Gallo's American team both claimed to have discovered the virus. Although it is generally accepted that Montagnier's team beat Gallo's to the punch, and that carelessness or malfeasance marred the work of Gallo's lab, Gallo remains a giant in the HIV research establishment. So it's worth noting that he, too, has acknowledged the role of cofactors. He writes

Notes on Contributors

Baloo is a *nom de plume* of Rex F. May.

David T. Beito is an associate professor of history at the University of Alabama, and author of *Taxpayers in Revolt* and *From Mutual Aid to the Welfare State*.

Jayant Bhandari is a Vancouver (Canada) based writer.

Doug Casey is a contributing editor of *Liberty*.

S.H. Chambers is a cartoonist living in California.

Robert Chatfield is a Maine-based business owner and adjunct professor of finance at two universities.

Stephen Cox is a professor at UC San Diego. His most recent book is *The New Testament and Literature*.

Jacques Delacroix is a former professor of management and a sociologist by training. He lives in one of the Bellies of the Collectivist Beast, Santa Cruz, with his wife, the artist Krishna Delacroix.

Andrew Ferguson is a contributing editor of *Liberty*. At present he is working on a biography of science-fiction writer R.A. Lafferty.

Brian J. Gladish is a longtime libertarian and more recently a student of Austrian economics residing in Prescott Valley, Arizona.

Lori Heine is a freelance journalist and playwright from Goldwater country. Her work is most often seen in the LGBT Christian magazines *Whosoever* and *The Epistle*.

Gary Jason is a contributing editor of *Liberty*.

John Kannarr is a retired director of information systems and ex-actuarial analyst for an insurance company.

Ted Levy is a political writer in the southern United States.

Wendy McElroy writes from Collingwood, Ontario.

Robert H. Miller is a builder, outdoor adventure guide, and author of *Kayaking the Inside Passage: A Paddler's Guide from Olympia, Washington to Muir Glacier, Alaska*.

Randal O'Toole is a senior fellow with the Cato Institute and the author of *Gridlock: Why We're Stuck in Traffic and What to Do About It*.

Michael Owen has a degree in psychology from the University of California, San Diego. He travels the world with a live entertainment company.

Patrick Quealy may be found in his natural habitat, a Seattle coffee shop.

Bruce Ramsey is a journalist in Seattle.

Jane S. Shaw is president of the John William Pope Center for Higher Education Policy.

Jo Ann Skousen is entertainment editor of *Liberty*. She lives in New York.

Tim Slagle is a standup comedian living in Chicago. His website is timslagle.com.

Jim Walsh is an assistant editor of *Liberty*.

Marlaine White is a former government attorney completing a Ph.D. in international relations and comparative politics at the University of Maryland.

Jeff Wrobel is an engineer who blows up missiles in the Marshall Islands.

Leland B. Yeager is Ludwig von Mises Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Economics at Auburn University.

in his book "Virus Hunting" (1991) that a family of viruses he discovered, the HTLVs, "are the only known specific co-factors for AIDS" (248, emphasis his). In "Virus," Montagnier's book on HIV for a lay audience, he briefly argues against Duesberg and calls him dangerous. But this is at the end of an entire chapter

At least some of the interviews were done under false pretenses. In the end, does it matter?

about the improbability that all AIDS cases are caused by HIV alone. Thus, even the man who discovered the virus is on record doubting what dissenters call the "HIV=AIDS=Death" model. He has not backed down from this view.

Montagnier believes that bacteria called mycoplasmas may help HIV cause immunodeficiency. He has speculated that

sexual liberation and an increase in multiple partnerships among certain homosexual populations in Western countries led to the spread of a family of mycoplasmas . . . from a rectointestinal localization to a genital one, and then to systemic blood infections. Such infections would have gone unnoticed, being easily tolerated, if not for the unexpected arrival of HIV, which was endemic in Africa. ("Virus," 176)

This is the most surprising single fact one encounters when investigating the AIDS causation controversy: the belief of important mainstream researchers is not that "HIV causes AIDS" but something more like "HIV has something to do with causing AIDS." These researchers don't often get asked useful questions. When they do, they may not want to answer. And when they answer, we don't like to think about the implications of their answers, so we simply don't.

To that end, Leung's film is invaluable. He managed to interview all the heavies of the HIV research establishment, and I look forward to getting the DVD (available in June 2010), which he says will have some of the hundreds of hours of footage that didn't make the film. I was surprised that he got some of

those fellows on tape at all. I wouldn't expect Bob Gallo, for instance, to sit down with a young filmmaker sympathetic to the dissidents. At the Q&A after the film in January, I asked how the interviews came to be. The "in" was Martin Delaney, a significant figure in AIDS activism. Leung and Delaney were on friendly terms, and Delaney agreed to be interviewed. Gallo, as I expected, had originally declined to be interviewed for the documentary; but Delaney, a friend of Gallo's, got him to sit for an interview after all. Thence, a domino effect brought other big names who didn't want their voices left out.

Some of the scientists say things in the film that will surprise most people, and many of them now say that these things were "taken out of context." Isn't that always the way? Delaney died before the film was released, so he can't be asked whether it is what Leung told him it would be or whether he regretted facilitating interviews with "respectable" AIDS scientists. It seems likely that at least some of the interviews were done under false pretenses — that Leung knew he was making an essentially pro-dissenter documentary but portrayed it as an uncontroversial documentary about the sociology of AIDS. Leung denies this, and in the end, does it matter? Suppose he did interview the scientists without telling them what kind of documentary he was filming, then cherry-picked quotations. Using the footage to put words in their mouths would be a problem; but if he's only showing them saying things they wish they hadn't said, so much the better. That is in the best tradition of investigative journalism.

I suspect there is some of both. Don Francis is shown saying, "Gallo said he had all these viruses, and it was a lie." The implication is that Francis, who previously worked in Gallo's lab, is endorsing the idea that HIV hasn't been properly isolated and may not be a real virus. He was likely talking about the controversy over who discovered the virus, saying that Montagnier's French team beat Gallo's American team. On the other hand, Montagnier is shown saying, "We can be exposed to HIV many times without being chronically infected. Our immune system will get rid of the virus within a few weeks, if you have a good immune system."

That should astonish people who have accepted conventional ideas about HIV as propagated by doctors, STD counselors, and the like; but the remark is quite in character for Montagnier. There is no reason to suppose its meaning is misrepresented, and in fact we know it was not: Leung has released four minutes of footage, from which the quotation was drawn, in which Montagnier explains that HIV transmission can be decreased by making impoverished people healthier and thus more able to fight off HIV.

Authorities whom no one would label dissenters agree that, relative to most diseases, it's difficult to get AIDS, and not only for the reason Montagnier gives. Estimates range from hundreds to even thousands of unprotected sexual contacts with an infected person that, on average, are necessary for a person to become positive. Use condoms correctly and the risk is exceedingly low. If you do become positive, Montagnier says you have a good chance of fighting HIV off, just as you fight off a cold after a couple of weeks (indeed, HIV can cause symptoms like the common cold in the acute phase a few weeks after infection). And then, if you don't fight it off, it may be years before you become ill, or decades, or you may never become ill, and we don't know why. It's still a very bad idea to be careless about HIV. Even one chance in a thousand isn't one you want to take when the consequence

If Leung is showing them saying things they wish they hadn't said, so much the better.

is AIDS, and many factors in specific cases can raise or lower these general figures by orders of magnitude. But this is hardly the model of AIDS we've been given by health authorities. Leung's film and the skeptics' books are among the few places you might discover this.

Not all those called dissidents comprise a separate camp from the mainstream. Some are more a bridge between disparate parts of it. I wondered for years whether I were the only person to see this; the skeptics themselves do not

often mention it. At the Q&A, Leung said something similar: he doesn't think of "House of Numbers" as a dissident film, because all he did was put scientists in front of a camera and show what they're saying, and how damaging some of the orthodox AIDS scientists' own positions are to conventional ideas about HIV and AIDS. "You can take out the controversial people," he said, "and you still have a damning documentary." He's right: less interesting than what the dissidents in the film say is what the orthodox AIDS experts say, and it's nothing they haven't been saying for a long time.

Among frontline researchers and clinicians, opinion has been diverse since AIDS began, and it remains that way. The consensus among most of them now is that HIV is a real retrovirus and causes AIDS, but less settled are such questions as: How do you test for HIV? How bad is AIDS in Africa, and what should be done about it? How important are pathogenic and toxicological cofactors or oxidative stress? How does HIV even cause AIDS? Public health authorities' confident, soundbite answers make these sound like settled questions, but in understanding AIDS we're barely out of the dark ages.

The skeptics have made important contributions to the understanding and treatment of HIV. Five stand out.

First, the skeptics fill in details and correct mistakes. The conventional narrative about HIV and AIDS may be essentially correct, but imprecise — wrong on small points that eventually will be better understood. If HIV needs cofactors to do its dirty work (perhaps only sometimes), or if it's only one of many causes of the various immunodeficiencies lumped into the syndrome "AIDS," then people like Bauer and Culshaw have as much to contribute to AIDS science as their mainstream counterparts.

Second, the skeptics have implicitly questioned whether medical professionals take a public-health approach or an individualized approach to treating patients. This question reflects the larger healthcare debate: one look at the practice of AIDS medicine ought to give pause to proponents of government, by-the-books health care. HIV medicine is like cancer medicine in one sense: the drugs hurt you, but they are sup-

posed to hurt HIV more. (In fact, AZT, the first and best-known anti-HIV drug, was originally created to be an anti-cancer drug. It was shelved because it was deemed too toxic for cancer chemotherapy. It is still in use against HIV and is given even to newborns to prevent perinatal transmission.) The difference is that chemotherapy runs for a few days or weeks, whereas HIV meds are taken for the rest of your life. When that is the standard treatment regimen, you want your doctor to be intimately concerned with your wishes, your well-being, and your values — not just reading "best practices" out of the latest letter to the editor of a medical journal.

Third, the skeptics point out the danger of the tight nexus of government and the HIV research establishment. They view HIV research as a make-work program created in the nick of time to save jobs in the failing War on Cancer. A bunch of virologists were looking for cancer viruses and couldn't find enough of them. Along came HIV, and they had a new virus to research. Many of the skeptics think government funding and direction of research has done for HIV what libertarians think the War on Drugs has done for crime, or

the welfare state has done for poverty.

Fourth, perhaps without meaning to, the HIV dissenters provide a reference point for understanding other controversies. One of Culshaw's chapters is entitled "Science by Consensus." If that

*How do you test for HIV?
How bad is AIDS in Africa,
and what should be done
about it?*

sounds familiar, it's because it is a common criticism of global-warming hysteria — that it embraces a conclusion simply because enough scientists have accepted a politically charged narrative, without demand for a good reason to reject the null hypothesis. The problems in HIV science are institutional, and they are not confined to the HIV controversy or to medical science.

An article could be written just on these last two points. Skeptical science journalism is an underappreciated genre. Gary Taubes proposes in "Good

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Calories, Bad Calories: Fats, Carbs, and the Controversial Science of Diet and Health" (2007) that, contrary to what the government has been telling us for decades, refined carbohydrates are responsible for much of the incidence of several "diseases of civilization," from heart disease to diabetes to cancer to Alzheimer's. He persuasively argues, for example, that evidence "suggests that eating a porterhouse steak in lieu of bread or potatoes would actually reduce heart-disease risk, although virtually no nutritional authority will say so publicly. The same is true for lard and bacon" (169). While reading "Good Calories, Bad Calories," I made a list of parallels between it and the HIV skeptical literature. I stopped counting after more than a dozen such. The story is basically the same: substitute fat for HIV, and carbs for lifestyle factors in immunodeficiency. Different critics of mainstream science arrive independently at critiques of similar or identical form.

Finally, the skeptics point out when HIV-related science is done badly. There is a lot of bad science; it's not surprising that some of it is done in the name of understanding HIV, at which ungodly great gobs of government and private money have been thrown. One small flaw in the protocol of a study, or the interpretation of its results, and the results may be worthless. The skeptics make a convincing case to this reader

Enough research has been done on HIV that one could find data demonstrating almost anything.

that, if the mainstream is correct, it's as much despite sloppy science as because of good science. Bauer notes the careless work done even by such respected concerns as the Centers for Disease Control:

Up to and including 1985, CDC had listed among AIDS cases, first, those who were homosexual or bisexual men; second — *among the remaining cases only* — intravenous drug abusers (IDU); and then hemophiliacs, transfusion recipients, heterosexual con-

tacts, and other. Every case went into only one of those categories, making it impossible to detect possible combinations of two or more risk factors that might be an especially powerful inducement to AIDS. (190)

A problem with government science, as with all central planning, is that when one "expert" panel decides what will be considered true, reality is short-circuited. Many lives may be endangered because half a dozen researchers have made bad decisions. Here, the foundational epidemiological work appears unbelievably bad, and there's more where that came from.

Bauer hypothesizes that AIDS is not a new syndrome, and that HIV is not a virus but an artifact of imprecise medicine, bad science, and circular definitions. It is, he suggests, a composite indicator of general health and a surrogate marker for many conditions. It would then be like a fever: not something for which one is "positive or negative" for life, but a temporary state that may come and go as one experiences such challenges as illness, stress, or pregnancy. Arguments between skeptics and the establishment about the accuracy and usefulness of HIV tests are easy to turn up with a quick web search, so I won't recapitulate them here. Suffice it to say, as is often the case in medical practice, what patients are told is a simplified version of a messy truth. The standard testing protocol in the United States is not positive or negative for the virus, but produces results along a continuum of reactivity with HIV antibodies.

In a comparison of seroprevalence studies, psychiatric patients' likelihood of being HIV positive appears to rival that of STD clinic patients and gay men. A study found that, for patients presenting at a hospital emergency department, "penetrating trauma was the only clinical presentation predictive of HIV seroprevalence independent of age, race, and risk-factor status" — that is, being seriously physically injured made people more likely to test positive. And among drug users, testing positive was associated with the drug used — with crack cocaine carrying a higher risk than three IV drugs, which we can presume are often injected with shared needles. Some of the correlations could be attributable to other

factors — for example, more serious wounds might follow from a more reckless lifestyle, which also predisposes to AIDS risk behavior — but the studies, taken together, are supposed to suggest a connection between the amount of stress on the body and how likely one is to test positive, as Bauer's hypothesis predicts. Then again, enough research has been done on HIV that one could probably find a certain amount of data demonstrating almost anything.

Bauer shares more of these curious findings, but science at its best is not about an accumulation of facts with which to oppose others' facts; it's about crafting and testing hypotheses that explain all the observations. Bauer's more compelling evidence is marshaled in several chapters examining the consequences of the fact that seropositivity varies independently with sex, age, race, and population density.

These chapters are the crux of the book. I don't think that they comprise anything like an open-and-shut case against the HIV theory, but they are manifestly the work of a scientist and a freethinker of the sort that medical schools and research institutions ruthlessly weed out. That alone inclines me to value Bauer's analysis.

Some of Bauer's references are to scattershot data from genealogy websites rather than, say, academic journals. He does not establish the reliability of these websites. He uses a quantitative method he apparently invented, without any outside critique of its value or reliability, to claim "satisfactory agreement" between sets of data. The reader can be forgiven for wondering whether Bauer massaged the data to get the results he wanted (as some researchers in every subject area do). Occasional weaknesses such as these, however, appear to be the exception.

Bauer's chastisement of scientific carelessness is refreshing. Unquestioning propagation of public-health statistics, and bad interpretations thereof, both by journalists and by activists, lead to more and more taxpayer and philanthropic funds inefficiently chasing whichever disease has the most lobbyists fighting for it.

It doesn't always take a Ph.D. in molecular biology to know bad science when one sees it. I still remember a shocking blurb I saw on the front page of

The Wall Street Journal (Sept. 19, 2008). Without further explanation, it said that the World Health Organization had reduced its estimate of the number of people who get malaria each year from 500 million to 247 million. First-world people have learned to gloss over statistics about “bad things happening to people over there,” but think about the numbers! If you can’t be sure how many people are infected with something, not even to within *a quarter of a billion people*, what do you know about the toll the infection is taking?

An AP story tells me where the changed estimate came from: “In previous reports, WHO estimated the number of people who developed malaria outside Africa by using a map made in the 1960s that indicated the areas where malaria was likely to occur.” The report dryly notes that “many Asian countries have since begun gathering actual reports of malaria from doctors and health facilities.” That’s the state of the art in public-health surveillance in the same impoverished parts of the world where we’re supposed to be worrying about an AIDS epidemic.

And they’re not being any more careful about HIV and AIDS than they are about malaria. Kary Mullis, the alien abductee who won the Nobel Prize, has written an autobiography, “Dancing Naked in the Mind Field” (1998), which is a contrarian manifesto that’s great fun to read. Only part of it is about HIV, but it says:

An HIV positive man with tuberculosis has AIDS; if he tests negative he simply has tuberculosis. If he lives in Kenya or Colombia, where the test for HIV antibodies is too expensive, he is simply presumed to have the antibodies and therefore AIDS, and therefore he can be treated in the World Health Organization’s clinic. It’s the only medical help available in some places. And it’s free, because the countries that support the WHO are worried about AIDS. From the point of view of spreading medical facilities into areas where poor people live, AIDS has been a boon. We don’t poison them with AZT like we do our own people because it’s too expensive. We supply dressings for the machete cut on their left knee and call it AIDS. (179)

The politics of HIV is more complicated than the science of HIV, which might be surprising to many people —

but it should not be to those skeptical of statism, as it isn’t to skeptics of HIV.

Lest I be accused of whitewashing the bizarre, offensive, or unscientific methods of some HIV skeptics, let me say that most of them are, to say the least of it, unconventional. Bauer believes in the Loch Ness monster. Mullis had his alien abduction experience. A few prominent skeptics have lied about their credentials. They are, as a group, not impressively professional. But sometimes a group that has a lot of crackpots in it is still worth paying attention to. Walk around a national LP convention and this quickly becomes apparent.

There is seriousness and subtlety in the scholarship of the skeptics. Those like Duesberg, who make the starkest claims, get the most attention, but others ask questions and frankly admit they don’t have all the answers. Bauer is one of these. Culshaw, though less circumspect than Bauer, is another: a good summary of her book is her definition of AIDS as “not a disease so much as a sociopolitical construct that few people understand and even fewer question” (7). No one who knows much about AIDS can disagree with that. Or consider Michelle Cochrane’s position in “When AIDS Began” (2004) that “orthodox science and official public health surveillance practices often elide or wholly neglect analysis of the social factors that gave rise to and abet [the AIDS epidemic], the socioeconomic correlates of the disease, and the epidemiological evidence of patients’ multiple and synergistic risk factors for immune deficiency” (xxvi). Hardly as dismissive as “HIV doesn’t cause AIDS.”

I don’t need to mention that plenty of researchers in the HIV establishment have questionable methods and morals as well. These defects are endemic to the most successful strata of academic and scientific society. A whole book has been written on the unstable personality and unscrupulous methods of the American “co-discoverer” of HIV (see “Science Fictions” by John Crewdson [Little, Brown, 2002]). Nor do I accept one of the most frequent and intense objections to the skeptics, which is that, by questioning the mainstream view, they promote unsafe behavior and the spread of AIDS. Prudent use of prophylactics, and discretion in choosing

the number and nature of one’s sexual partners, was as good an idea before the era of AIDS as it is now.

But AIDS, it seems, is a black box that doctors lecture you about. Only bad patients would dare to ask why they should believe what the doctor is telling them, and only irresponsible scientists would ask questions about HIV. If anything, the skeptics advocate safer behavior than the mainstream. Many of them suggest that avoiding recreational drugs is of utmost importance in preventing or recovering from AIDS.

Prominent skeptics have lied about their credentials. They are, as a group, not impressively professional.

Meanwhile, mainstream doctors caution only that you use a condom when having sex under the influence of nitrite inhalants, and that heroin should be injected with clean, unshared, needles.

I’m not a cell biologist or a medical doctor or an epidemiologist. I can’t be sure, from books written for a popular audience and my best interpretation of highly technical papers, how right the skeptics are. When some of the skeptics say that HIV hasn’t been properly isolated, for example, I can’t tell if they’re making sense or not. I get the sense that they’re making mountains of molehills. (In fact, Duesberg argues against other skeptics that it *has* been properly isolated.) When they claim that the standards for declaring an HIV test positive or negative are arbitrary, they’re obviously right, to an extent — but I can’t tell how important their concerns may be. When your mechanic tells you to get your car’s oil changed every 6,000 miles, he’s using an arbitrary figure — 5,500 or 6,700 would probably do just as well — but that’s no indictment of your mechanic. Science can be messy and counterintuitive; that doesn’t mean it’s wrong.

When Leung dramatically steps across the Canadian border and says that, by doing so, a person diagnosed as HIV-positive in the United States may become negative because the Canadian criteria for a positive diagnosis are

different, it sounds damning — as it does when Celia Farber says in the March 2006 issue of *Harper's* that one “could revert to being HIV negative simply by buying a plane ticket from Uganda to Australia.” Bauer lists the proteins that constitute a positive result for Western Blot tests performed by different entities and says that even the CDC, FDA, and Red Cross don't agree with one another about what to consider as a positive result.

When dissidents criticize tests for HIV, they usually focus on the faults in antibody tests. Fair enough, because positive results on two types of antibody tests are sufficient for a positive diagnosis. They less often mention viral load tests, which are more expensive than antibody tests but are said to be more reliable. They can detect HIV sooner after infection, and they detect the virus itself rather than antibodies. They obviously work pretty well if HIV is an infectious agent that causes AIDS. They're used to screen the blood supply, and after almost 30 years of blood transfusions in a world with HIV, the risk of infection by transfusion is very small. But then, Mullis' Nobel-winning discovery is used in these tests, and he says that they use it incorrectly and the tests aren't actually measuring viral load. . . .

In short, the specifics of any discipline are likely to be incomprehensible to outsiders. Even after tracking down journal articles, one gets the feeling that the best information about AIDS filters out slowly from the HIV researchers and doctors on the front lines, and so is inaccessible to most of us — including the HIV skeptics, who tend to cite papers that are many years out of date.

A more accessible example from Duesberg's book, still widely regarded as the bible of the skeptic movement, shows how non-experts might be misled. In “Inventing the AIDS Virus,” he reproduces the laboratory label for AZT, the first drug that was considered a useful treatment for HIV infection. He claims that the label “reveals secrets not communicated to the unwitting patient” (324), because it has a skull and crossbones on it and it stipulates that the substance is “toxic by inhalation, in contact with skin and if swallowed. . . . Wear suitable protective clothing.” Here he is disingenuous at best: laboratory labels

for plenty of everyday chemicals — e.g., pure caffeine — bear comparable labels. Most medicines hurt you if you take enough of them. (Nathan Crow shot many holes in Duesberg's book in a review in the Sept. 1996 *Liberty*.)

Theories about how the establishment has screwed up something this big, for this long, rarely turn out to be true. There are astrophysicists and former high government officials, with bona fides to match those of Mullis and Montagnier and Duesberg, who swear that we're keeping aliens who crashed at Roswell at an Air Force base. They are sincere, they are good people, and they can make what seems, at first, a good case for their beliefs. But I don't think we have aliens on ice at Wright-Patterson, and I don't believe HIV is as harmless as a common cold virus.

On the other hand, I know the HIV dissident movement is not as simple as “the AIDS doctors who believe in HIV” versus “the people who say that HIV is harmless.” There ought to be meaningful discussion about the truth between those two extremes; lives might be improved or saved as a result.

George Bernard Shaw wrote in the preface to “*Saint Joan*” that, if called upon to adduce reasons to believe such an uncontroversial contention as that the earth is round, most of us could not do so, “because modern science has convinced us that nothing that is obvious is true, and that everything that is magical, improbable, extraordinary, gigantic, microscopic, heartless, or outrageous is scientific.” To say that “everybody knows” something is often to say that everybody *believes* it, but few know why.

The two areas around which “denialist” movements have most visibly grown up — HIV and climate change — are just this sort of issue. People are nervous at being unable to differentiate themselves, with logical explanations, from people they regard as kooks. But even if they're wrong, Leung and Bauer and Culshaw and other skeptics can help us *understand* the truth, whatever it is. It's safe to say they're not completely wrong. We ought to read their books, listen to what they have to say, and not prematurely assume that “the science is settled.” □

“*Alice in Wonderland*,” directed by Tim Burton. Disney Films, 2010, 108 minutes.

The Wonder Is Gone

Jo Ann Skousen

Keats' “Ode on a Grecian Urn” reminds us of the eternal nature of art. In the poem, Keats observes the scene depicted on an ancient vase and contemplates the “present tense” of art: the young man is always just about to kiss his bride; the dog is always in mid-leap; the sword is always raised to deflect the soldier's foe.

Tim Burton's new “*Alice in Wonderland*” is like Keats' urn. Although it takes place 13 years after the original tale, with Alice returning as a 20-year-old woman, nothing has changed in Wonderland. The Mad Hatter is still serving tea; the March Hare is still running late; the Queen of Hearts is still playing croquet with a hedgehog and a flamingo; and the Cheshire Cat is still blowing smoke

rings while grinning from his tree. One gets the impression that they have been pouring the same tea and swinging the same flamingo at the same hedgehog for the past 13 years, awaiting Alice's return, "for ever panting and for ever young."

But something is amiss in this visit to Wonderland. The wonder and the whimsy are gone. Grown-up Alice (Mia Wasikowska) is too somber, too wooden, and definitely too old. She doesn't even remember her first visit down the rabbit hole, and she certainly is not glad to be there now. In one brief scene, the Hatter (Johnny Depp) reminisces about Alice's first visit, when she was just 7. Young Alice (Mairi Ella Challan) laughs gleefully around the tea table with her new friends, aghast and delighted at their madcap lack of good manners. Twenty-year-old Alice expresses no such glee, perhaps because the Knave of Hearts is trying to make off with her head while she huddles inside the teapot. Not much fun there!

Too many fantasy films of late focus on climactic battles between forces of good and evil, presented in glorious computer-generated imagery. It's like watching a video game. This "Alice in Wonderland" develops a similar plot. According to an oraculum (a prophetic scroll emblazoned with heroic feats, much like Keats' Grecian Urn), Alice is destined to defeat the Jabberwock in order to unseat the head-offing Queen of Hearts (Helena Bonham Carter) and restore her peace-loving sister, the Queen of Diamonds (Anne Hathaway) to the throne. Residents of Wonderland (or "Underland," as they call it now) have been waiting for Alice's return.

As Alice gathers her courage to face the Jabberwock, the White Queen tells her, "You cannot live your life to please others. The choice must be your own." A good, strong, libertarian philosophy, to be sure. But does Alice really have a choice when her destiny is already written in the oraculum? Like the Mad Hatter, who has continued pouring that tea since Lewis Carroll first penned the scene, Alice already faces the Jabberwock unendingly in the painted scene.

Alice's method of securing the special sword she must use to fight the Jabberwock also gives a nod to sound libertarian principles; instead of steal-

ing it from the guard dog or fighting him for it, she gets something she knows he wants and trades him for it. Good show! But in the end, she resorts to traditional warfare to usurp the sitting queen.

Normally Tim Burton films are a visual and storytelling feast, and this one gets halfway there — the visual effects, and especially the costumes, are truly stunning. Every time Alice changes size via "Drink Me" and "Eat Me," she has to get new clothes, and each costume is lovelier and more whimsical than the last. When she is her tiniest, the Mad Hatter quickly whips out a tiny gossamer costume for her with a snip-snip-dash of what used to be her sash, a subtle nod to Depp's first stand-out role as "Edward Scissorhands." The computer-generated sets are stunning as well — especially the Red Queen's realm with its heart motifs everywhere.

In terms of storytelling, however, this film falls flat. Burton says he wanted to make "Alice" feel like a story

as opposed to a series of events, but in doing so he eliminated the childlike quality of Lewis Carroll's original story. Children, after all, don't see everything as a story with a beginning, a middle, and an end; much of life comes at them as a series of confusing and illogical events, and Carroll captured that.

I also suspect that producers at Disney tampered a bit with Burton's vision, injecting certain Disneyesque essentials. For example, the Jabberwock looks uncannily like the dragon at the end of Disney's "Sleeping Beauty" as it rears up at Alice who, dressed in princely armor, battles it to the top of a precipice.

Epic battles and prophetic heroes have a place in fairy tale and legend, but Alice belongs in Wonderland, and the two genres simply don't mix. As much as I wanted to love it, I have to admit that Tim Burton's "Alice in Wonderland" flops like a limp flamingo. Even Johnny Depp isn't able to rescue this film. □

"The Ghost Writer," directed by Roman Polanski. RP Films, 2010, 140 minutes.

The Haunting of Tony Blair

Jo Ann Skousen

When asked, during the opening moments of "The Ghost Writer," whether he voted for the prime minister whose memoirs he has been hired to write, the author responds with a shrug, "Of course. He wasn't a politician; he was a craze." It's perhaps the best line in the film, one that could describe our own recent election. But this thinly disguised roman à clef is not about Barack Obama; it deftly and gleefully impugns a politician from the other side of the pond.

Director Roman Polanski makes

no attempt at subtlety as he tries to connect Tony Blair with his fictional prime minister of Britain, Adam Lang (Pierce Brosnan). Lang is the handsome, charming, popular, recently retired Labour Party prime minister. Before entering politics, Blair attempted a career as a rock star with the band "Ugly Rumours"; similarly, Lang studied acting at Harvard. Like Blair, Lang is responsible for bringing Great Britain into the Middle East war. Like Blair, Lang is married to a dark-haired, politically savvy beauty (in the film, Olivia Williams), and like many politicians (though not necessarily Blair), Lang is

hinted to be romantically involved with a lovely assistant (Kim Cattrall). Even the rhythm of the two names is the same: Tony Blair, Adam Lang.

As the film opens, a body washes up on the shore of an unnamed island, suggesting that a murder has occurred. The body turns out to belong to Lang's original ghostwriter — the predecessor of the title character — suggesting that Lang is somehow connected with the murder. Lang arrives at the island that night aboard a private jet emblazoned with the corporate name "Hatherton," a thinly veiled reference to Halliburton, suggesting corruption. And if the audience still doesn't get it, Lang's former cabinet minister, Robert Rycart (Robert Pugh), accuses Lang on CNN of acquiescing to waterboarding in Iraq, suggesting war crimes. Yes, war crimes. By the following day, an international court in The Hague has formally charged Lang-Blair as a war criminal.

Politics aside, the film is an entertaining, though somewhat predictable, intellectual thriller. A new ghostwriter (Ewan McGregor) is hired as a replacement to revise Lang's memoirs. His character's name is never revealed; Lang calls him simply "Man," and the writer calls himself "the Ghost." It's a clever, self-deprecating nod to ghostwriters, since everyone knows that public figures use them, but seldom are they given credit.

Immediately after he is hired, the writer is attacked by mysterious assailants who steal what appears to be Lang's manuscript. Later, he finds clues left behind by his dead predecessor that lead him to suspect that Lang is hiding something. McGregor is excellent as the unnamed ghostwriter, injecting a sense of humor and ineptitude as well as suspense as he begins to realize that something sinister has happened.

The film is awash with atmosphere. The house where Lang and the writer work on his memoirs looks more like a bunker than a beach getaway — it is dark, gloomy, isolated. The Ghost works in an office with a floor-to-ceiling window overlooking wind-swept dunes, where throughout the day servants stridently but unsuccessfully try to sweep up the mess of leaves that constantly blows onto the patio — a metaphor, perhaps, for the implied coverup of crime.

Supporting actors add to the atmosphere, though many of them are almost cartoonishly presented. Watch for a bald and bloated Jim Belushi as the cigar-chomping publisher John Maddox, and a toothy, rat-faced Eli Wallach as the eccentric neighbor on the beach. Cattrall is fine in an uncharacteristically serious role, and Williams is especially cool and unsettling as the prime minister's now aging wife.

The most interesting thing in the film is the ghostwriter himself. The Ghost isn't like most other writers; he doesn't care about seeing his name on a cover or a byline, and he doesn't care about being known as a "serious writer." His most recent collaboration, a magician's memoir, is entitled, "I Came, I Sawed, I Conquered." He doesn't attend the publication parties of his books, explaining that "inviting the ghostwriter is rather like inviting the

mistress to the wedding." Even when clues begin showing up that could give him the book of the century, he isn't anxious to pursue them. "I'm not an investigative reporter!" he explains. This reluctance of the journalist to act like a journalist, portrayed with just the right combination of charm and confusion by McGregor, gives the film a certain freshness despite its somewhat predictable story line.

The connection between Lang and Blair unfortunately persists after the film ends. In fact, after watching the movie, the person with whom I saw it kept calling the PM character "Tony Blair" instead of "Adam Lang." Such a mistake is inevitable, unfair — and deliberately anticipated by the filmmakers. Polanski may not agree with Blair's politics. But to call Blair a war criminal, even by implication, goes too far. And speaking of criminals. . . . □

Filmnotes

Running the Asylum — "Shutter Island" (Paramount Pictures, 2010, 137 minutes) has all the ingredients of a satisfyingly dark, psychological thriller: an isolated setting, ambiguous foreshadowing, surreal flashbacks, an insane asylum, a sinister Germanic scientist (Max von Sydow), an intense soundtrack that rises to dissonant crescendos, and even the proverbial dark and stormy night. The story is twisted enough to keep the audience guessing, yet logical enough to convince the audience that its guesses are correct. Add Martin Scorsese as director, and the film is virtually guaranteed to be good — in fact, it's one of the best little surprises of the season.

The year is 1954. Shutter Island is a maximum security institution for the criminally insane. Ted Daniels (Leonardo DiCaprio) and his new partner Chuck Aule (Mark Ruffalo) have been called to the island to investigate the escape of an inmate (Emily Mortimer) from a locked room. During the investigation several creepy inmates warn Ted to get away. Hints of Nazi-style biological experi-

mentation fuel his growing paranoia — or could his rising panic be induced by the "aspirin" and "water" given to him by the institution's director, Dr. Cawley (Ben Kingsley)?

Whatever the cause, Ted is plagued by troubling dreams and flashbacks about his past. He was with the platoon that liberated the Nazi concentration camp at Dachau, and his wife (Michelle Williams) was murdered by an arsonist. He relives both horrors in vivid Technicolor dreams. The rest of the film is artfully shot in dark tones that echo Ted's darkening mood.

Scorsese's direction is metaphorically satisfying as well. The storm outside the institution is a metaphor for the *sturm und drang* inside. Ted's constant lack of matches with which to light his borrowed cigarettes suggest his lost passion, while Dr. Cawley's pipe exhalations billow like an elaborate smoke screen as he spins a tale for Ted. But what's the purpose of the unexplained bandaid on Ted's forehead? This is a film that will keep you guessing right till the end.

— Jo Ann Skousen

Seattle

The subtle art of neology, in the *Seattle Times*:

Decades ago, poor children became known as “disadvantaged” to soften the stigma of poverty. Then they were “at-risk.” Now, a Washington lawmaker wants to replace those euphemisms with a new one, “at hope.”

Democratic State Sen. Rosa Franklin says negative labels are hurting kids’ chances for success and she’s not a bit concerned that people will be confused by her proposed rewrite of the 54 places in state law where words like “at risk” and “disadvantaged” are used.

Broward County, Fla.

Go granny, go granny, go granny go, from the *Miami Herald*:

A 78-year-old Hallandale Beach grandmother ticketed for driving with a suspended driver’s license spent 15 days in jail before authorities announced her license wasn’t suspended and an outraged judge set her free.

The prolonged jailing of an elderly woman with no previous criminal record over a traffic ticket has left red-faced authorities admitting they botched her case. County Court Judge Lee J. Seidman ordered Gabrielle Shaink Trudeau’s release at her arraignment. “She’s handcuffed like Houdini, for the record. She’s got chains around her waist, and she’s got handcuffs in front around her hands as if she was some kind of a violent criminal,” the judge said, according to a transcript.

Colorado Springs, Colo.

Precautionary stand against foam-rubber porno, in the *Denver News*:

Puppet cleavage has been ruled out for advertising posters in Colorado Springs bus shelters. Lamar Advertising rejected posters for a touring production of the Broadway show “Avenue Q” because they show the cleavage of a fuzzy pink puppet.

The poster has been replaced by one showing the face of another puppet.

Durham, N.C.

Discounted dildos and Duke dissertations, from the *Raleigh News and Observer*:

At Duke University, a sex toy study being conducted by a behavioral economist and student health workers has roused criticism.

Researchers recruited female Duke students to take part in a “sexually explicit” study on Tupperware-style parties in which sex toys, not kitchenware, are the draw. The ads, which were posted around campus and on a research study Web site, sought female students at least 18 years old to “view sex toys and engage in sexually explicit conversation with other female Duke students.”

Participants will be asked to complete online questionnaires about their sexual attitudes and behaviors and visit the lab for a “one-hour party” with seven or eight women. The students will be asked to complete a second questionnaire a couple of months later, and will receive a gift bag and be given the opportunity to purchase items at a significantly reduced rate, according to the ad.

Evanston, Ill.

Teaching Illinois politics to a new generation, from an announcement in the *Daily Northwestern*:

Former Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich will speak to the Northwestern community on Tuesday, March 2 at Cahn Auditorium. The event, titled “Ethics in Politics: An evening with Former Governor Rod Blagojevich,” is sponsored by College Democrats.

“A conversation about ethics and politics is important to have,” said Dan Rockoff, vice president of programming for College Democrats. “There isn’t a better person out there to discuss this than former Governor Rod Blagojevich.”

Mount Holly, N.J.

Solomonic jurisprudence on display, captured in the *Philadelphia Daily News*:

A Superior Court judge dismissed animal-cruelty charges against a Moorestown police officer accused of sticking his penis into the mouths of five calves in rural Southampton in 2006, claiming a grand jury couldn’t infer whether the cows had been “tormented” or “puzzled” by the situation or even irritated that they’d been duped out of a meal.

“If the cow had the cognitive ability to form thought and speak, would it say, ‘Where’s the milk? I’m not getting any milk,’” Judge James J. Morley asked.

Children, Morley said, seemed “comforted” when given pacifiers, but there’s no way to know what bovine minds thought of Robert Melia, Jr., substituting his member for a cow’s teat. “They [children] enjoy the act of suckling,” the judge said. “Cows may be of a different disposition.”

Helena, Mont.

Questionable choice of metaphor, passed along by the *Helena Independent Record*:

After 12 hours of deliberation, a jury sided with the parents of former American Legion baseball pitcher Brandon Patch in a civil suit over the player’s death after being struck by a batted ball during a game in Helena.

Aluminum bat maker Hillerich & Bradsby Co. failed to provide adequate warning as to the dangers of the bat used by a Helena Senators player during the game, at least eight of the jurors agreed.

As the verdict was read, Duane Patch clutched his wife in an embrace as they both wiped tears, and he repeatedly pointed to the sky, as if to his son. “That’s a grand slam,” he said.

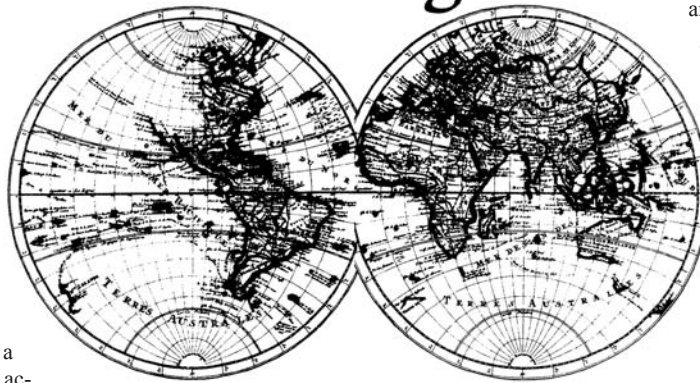
Salem, Ore.

Innovation in legislative semantics, well spotted by *The Oregonian*:

A sample of the new language inserted into House Bill 2414:


“A measure referred to the people by referendum petition may not be adopted unless it receives an affirmative majority of the total votes cast on the measure rejecting the measure. For purposes of this subsection, a measure is considered adopted if it is rejected by the people.”

Terra Incognita



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(Readers are invited to forward news clippings or other items for publication in Terra Incognita, or email to terraincognita@libertyunbound.com.)



The city of Dallas has banned nearly all commercial signs
in store windows.

But the First Amendment doesn't distinguish between
commercial speech and other kinds of speech.

And neither should the city of Dallas.

I am standing up for the free speech
rights of all small businesses in Dallas.

I am IJ.