

# stanislaus CONNECTIONS

Working for peace, justice and a sustainable environment

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## “Let there be Peace on Earth and Let it begin with me”

By JANA and MICHAEL CHIAVETTA

This is the inspiration and belief behind the formation of the Modesto Peace/Life Center Social Justice Youth Gathering. This title is a bit cumbersome but this is what we are calling the meeting that is occurring on the first Tuesday of each month at the Modesto Peace/Life Center from 6-7 P.M. The “gathering” is open to high school students who are interested in social justice issues such as peace, the environment, civil rights and community involvement. At the Social Justice Youth Leadership Conference, held at the end of September, high school participants attended a workshop that introduced them to the concept of becoming a “Peace Maker.” The hope was that enough students would be interested enough to continue the training at a monthly meeting. The first gathering was held in October and a grand total of one student attended. We were not discouraged and held the second meeting on November 3rd and six students attended. So we are on our way!

The purpose of the meeting is to hold workshops that teach the attendees the skills necessary to be a “Peace Maker.” The brainchild for this is Jana Chiavetta and her commitment to a wonderful program called “Resolving Conflict Creatively Program” (RCCP). This was a program initiated by Modesto City Schools over a decade ago to help students develop the skills to resolve their own personal conflicts in a creative and peaceful manner. Alas, due to budget cuts, the program, in which Jana was a district-wide trainer, has been abandoned. The PLC board has decided to support this program for students who are interested in participating. A “typical” gathering will include a peace lesson, among other activities. The goal is to challenge students to think and react in a “peaceful” manner to the everyday stresses of their daily lives and to, by their actions, pay it forward to their peers.

November’s gathering was extremely enlightening and, by the response of the students, a success. It began with a group interview that allowed the students to interact with each other in a non-threatening way. The attendees came from different high schools and diverse backgrounds. The questions asked simple things like what do you like to do on Saturday? (The most common answer was “sleep”) or, what is your favorite food? One student, a Latino, likes spaghetti, and another, of Italian descent, likes burritos.

After this roundabout interview process, everyone was more relaxed and energized with the feeling that they had

*Annual Modesto Peace/Life Center  
Holiday Party Potluck  
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*Friday, December 11, 2009  
6 p.m. to 9 p.m.*

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## The next phase of healthcare apartheid

By NORMAN SOLOMON

In Washington, “healthcare reform” has degenerated into a sick joke.

At this point, only spinners who’ve succumbed to their own vertigo could use the word “robust” to describe the public option in the healthcare bill that the House Democratic leadership has sent to the floor.

“A main argument was that a public plan would save people money,” *The New York Times* has noted. But the insurance industry — claiming to want a level playing field — has gotten the Obama administration to bulldoze the plan. “After House Democratic leaders unveiled their health care bill [on October 29], the Congressional Budget Office said the public plan would cost more than private plans and only 6 million people would sign up.”

At its best, “the public option” was a weak remedy for the disastrous ailments of the healthcare system in the United States. But whatever virtues the public option may have offered were stripped from the bill en route to the House floor.

What remains is a Rube Goldberg contraption that will launch this country into a new phase of healthcare apartheid.

People who scrape together enough money to buy health insurance will discover that they’re riding in the back of the nation’s healthcare bus. The most “affordable” policies will be the ones with the highest deductibles and the worst coverage.

YOUTH GATHERING . . . . continued p. 2

HEALTHCARE . . . . . continued p. 10

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## Youth gathering

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met new friends and had a lot more in common with each other than they realized. The second activity was a one-on-one interview. Each participant was asked to sit facing each other, "knees to knees" so that each participant would have the other's utmost attention. They were able to ask each other either the questions from the earlier interview or any question that they wanted to ask. One student was asked if she could change one thing in the world what it would be. She thought for a few seconds and then said, "Anger." She went on to explain that she felt that anger and its relationship to the past is what is holding the world back from moving forward to a more peaceful future. For the rest of the lesson, students voiced their opinions on an "opinion continuum" that gave rise to some very interesting dialogue and really helped them understand each other's perspectives.

At the gathering's conclusion, each participant was asked to use one to three words to describe their experience of the last hour. The words that were given included; hope, interesting, smiley brilliant, fun, and safe. From the enthusiasm and participation we would say that the hour was worthwhile. We observed that the participants really felt that they were in an environment in which they were valued and that they were being listened to. For young people, and for all of us, this is a good thing.

We are hoping that progressive minded students will participate in the gatherings and will become energized to make the world a better and more peaceful place. As Margaret Mead said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world."

Where this goes from here is anyone's guess. Our next Social Justice Youth Gathering is on Tuesday, December 1st from 6:00 to 7:00 P.M. at the Modesto Peace/Life Center, 720 13th Street, Downtown Modesto. High school students interested in learning the skills to be able to solve conflict creatively and peacefully are welcome to attend. We hope to see you there!

Any questions or if you would like to attend, email [chiavetta.m@monet.k12.ca.us](mailto:chiavetta.m@monet.k12.ca.us). We need to know about how many are coming so that we may provide enough refreshments.

## Stanislaus CONNECTIONS

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Local high students attending the Peace/Life Center's first Social Justice Youth Leadership Conference held in October. Photos: Jim Costello





# Help! MLK Commemoration needs sponsors

By JAMES COSTELLO

To keep Martin Luther King, Jr.'s vision fresh and provocative locally, for the last fifteen years a committee of community groups including the Modesto Peace Life Center, the City of Modesto, Modesto Junior College, and California State University, Stanislaus has offered our community an inspiring Martin Luther King Commemoration.

We invite you to co-sponsor our 16th Annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Commemoration on Friday, January 22, 2010 at Modesto Junior College's Main Auditorium-Performing and Media Arts Center on East Campus at 7:00 p.m. Your reward will be a stimulating evening and VIP seating.

The dynamic Willie Brown will speak. Mr. Brown has had an illustrious career serving over thirty years in the California State Assembly, fifteen years as its Speaker and, afterward, as the only African-American mayor of San Francisco.

Our speakers bring Dr. King's philosophy of nonviolence into our contemporary reality by reflecting on their experiences and social commitments. They connect the past with the present to inspire us to act for a more just and peaceful future.

**The event is free so as many people as possible can attend. But our costs are considerable.** We depend solely on donations of money or services from our initial co-sponsors and from caring groups, businesses, and individuals like you. **Will you help us bring Willie Brown to our community?**

**ACTION:** Make your tax-deductible check payable to "Modesto Peace Life Center-MLK." Send it to Jim Costello, 1849 Richard Way, Ceres, CA 95307-4504. The Peace Life Center is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization. Our tax ID # is 94-2800825. Information: [jcostello@igc.org](mailto:jcostello@igc.org)



MAKE A  
Difference.

# Study Circles on Race & Diversity in Stanislaus County starts 3rd month

By MARIA QUIJALVO, Modesto/Stanislaus NAACP

*Presented by the Modesto/Stanislaus NAACP and the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship*

The Modesto/Stanislaus NAACP and the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship will start the 3rd Month of a 6-month study circle on Race and Diversity in Stanislaus County. Conversation circles take place the **second Thursday of every month** and end on March 11, 2010. The **next meeting is Thursday, December 10.**

The purpose of the conversation circles is to open community dialogue in a friendly setting to discuss issues of race and diversity.

# Where are the real deficit hawks?

By DAVID SIROTA, *truthout* Op-Ed

Let's say you're a congressperson or tea party leader looking to champion deficit reduction — a cause 38 percent of Americans tell pollsters they support. And let's say you're deciding whether to back two pieces of imminent legislation.

According to the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office, the first bill's spending provisions cost \$100 billion annually and its tax and budget-cutting provisions recoup \$111 billion annually, thus reducing total federal expenditures by \$11 billion each year. The second bill proposes \$636 billion in annual spending and recoups nothing. Over 10 years, the first bill would spend \$1 trillion and recover \$1.11 trillion — a fantastic return on taxpayer investment. Meanwhile, the second bill puts us on a path to spend \$6.3 trillion in the same time.

Save \$110 billion, or spend \$6.3 trillion? If you're explicitly claiming the mantle of fiscal prudence, this should be a no-brainer: You support the first bill and oppose the second one.

Yet, in recent months, the opposite happened.

When the House considered a health care expansion proposal that the CBO says will reduce the deficit by \$11 billion a year, tea party protestors and Congress' self-described "fiscal conservatives" opposed it on cost grounds. At the same time, almost none of them objected when Congress passed a White House-backed bill to spend \$636 billion on defense in 2010.

The hypocrisy is stunning — lots of "budget hawk" complaints about health legislation reducing the deficit and few "budget hawk" complaints about defense initiatives that, according to Government Executive magazine, "puts the President on track to spend more on defense, in real dollars, than any other president has in one term of office since World War II." And that estimate doesn't even count additional spending on the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

So, as Bob Dole might ask, where's the public outrage at the contradiction? It's nowhere. Well, why not?

One clear answer is values — or lack thereof. In our militaristic culture, we are taught to prioritize Pentagon spending over everything else.

Another less obvious answer is ignorance sown by skewed reporting.

The health bill's expenditures are typically described by reporters in 10-year, \$1 trillion terms while defense spending is described — if at all — as a one-year, \$636 billion outlay.

That can lead citizens to think the health care bill will cost more than defense — when, in fact, the 10-year comparison pits a \$1 trillion health care bill against \$6.3 trillion in projected defense spending.

But even that's not apples to apples. Political headlines of late have all been some version of Dow Jones newswire's recent screamer: "CBO Puts Health Bill Cost At \$1 Trillion." That's as true as an Enron press release touting only one side of the company's ledger. Though the bill's expenditures do total \$1 trillion, the CBO confirms its other provisions recover more than that, meaning headlines should read "CBO Says Health Bill Saves \$110 Billion."

Not surprisingly, the media distortions are being trumpeted by the same congressional hypocrites simultaneously backing bigger Pentagon budgets and opposing health reform. Their dishonest arguments were summed up by Sen. Joe Lieberman in a Fox News interview last week. Ignoring CBO data about the health bill and the deficit, the Connecticut lawmaker (who voted for the bloated defense bill) insisted health legislation must be stopped because it will rack up "debt (that) can break America."

Only professional liars could cite concern about debt as reason to oppose a health care bill reducing the debt — and then vote for debt-expanding defense budgets. Unfortunately, professional liars are the norm in today's politics, not the exception — and they're leading America off the fiscal cliff.

David Sirota is the author of the best-selling books *Hostile Takeover* and *The Uprising*. He blogs at [www.OpenLeft.com](http://www.OpenLeft.com). E-mail him at [ds@davidsirota.com](mailto:ds@davidsirota.com)

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## Stanislaus Connections needs help!

We need good writers willing to submit articles on peace, justice and the environment, written especially from a local perspective. All articles should be less than 900 words and are subject to editing. Please contact Jim Costello at [jcostello@igc.org](mailto:jcostello@igc.org).

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"I am excited about the Study/Action Circles and hope they will build bridges of understanding and cooperation between the varied groups in our community. The Modesto area and each of us individually will gain from these connections," stated Reverend Grace Simons, Pastor of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship.

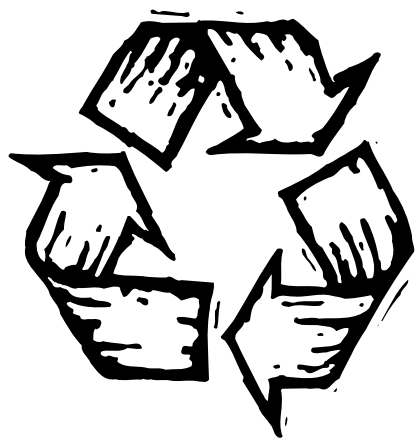
**ACTION:** When: 2nd Thursday of the month. Ends March 11, 2010, 6:00 p.m. — 8:00 p.m., Modesto Church of the Brethren, 2301 Woodland Ave., Modesto, Contact: (209) 882-1480. Email NAACP Stanislaus: [naacpstanislaus@yahoo.com](mailto:naacpstanislaus@yahoo.com)

## Cleaning the world: one soap bar at a time

### From Clean the World

Our goal is mighty, but our solution is simple — save the millions of lives lost each year to acute lower-respiratory infection and diarrheal illness by distributing recycled soap with the appropriate educational materials to sustain good personal hygiene practices.

Where are we getting all of this soap? Each month, hundreds of thousands of hotels and motels across the world discard tons of slightly-used soap and shampoo. These products often end up in already overflowing landfills and can potentially contaminate fragile groundwater systems. Through our Participating Partners Program, Clean the World collects and repurposes these products using environmentally-friendly and hygienically-safe recycling efforts.



With the donations of these discarded soap and shampoo products, Clean the World is a step closer to reaching our goal of preventing the millions of lives lost each year — and we're doing it one bar of soap at a time.

Every \$1 donation will recycle two hotel rooms for an entire month. That equates to 40 bars of soap and 40 bottles of shampoo that will not hit our landfills and water systems, but instead supply 5 needy families with a life saving necessity for ONE MONTH.

**Donate Soap & Shampoo:** If you would like to donate soap or shampoo, please send it to:

Clean The World  
c/o Threads of Compassion  
4625 Old Winter Garden Rd.  
Unit B-7  
Orlando FL 32811

If you are a hotel, motel or company that would like to donate soap and/or shampoo call:

Paul Till - Managing Director  
1+ 407-404-0379

ptill@cleantheworld.org.

Visit Clean the World at <http://www.cleantheworld.org/>



## John McCutcheon returns in concert

By KEN SCHROEDER

John McCutcheon returns in concert for the Modesto Peace/Life Center on Thursday, January 21, 2010 at 7:00 P.M. This is the ninth annual benefit concert for the 6-time Grammy-nominated singer/songwriter, multi-instrumentalist, storyteller and author. Last year's concert played to an enthusiastic full house.

This year John released a double CD of songs and stories titled *Untold*. Disk 1, *Word*, was recorded live at the 2008 National Storytelling Festival and is the first in-depth exploration of John's prodigious gifts as a storyteller. Disk 2, *Song*, features 3 refugees from the now out-of-print *Hail to the Chief* and *Stand Up* albums plus 9 new songs that many declare showcase the best writing John's done in years. Of special note is a beautiful duet with Suzy Bogguss on his "Old People in Love," and "Streets of Sarajevo," with accompaniment by Vedran Smailovic, the Cellist of Sarajevo.

The concert will take place at the Modesto Church of the Brethren, 2301 Woodland Ave. Tickets are \$20 in advance, \$23 at the door, \$5 for young people 17 and under. Tickets for groups of 10 or more are \$15 each. Tickets are available

at the church, 523-1438 and at the Anderson Frame Shop and Gallery, 1323 J St., 579-9913.

As in previous years, we are offering a chance to be a sponsor of the concert. For the suggested donation, you'll receive tickets to the concert, your name in the program, reserved seating at the concert, and an invitation to a reception with John McCutcheon following the performance. Five levels of sponsorship are available:

Autoharp — \$40 **One** ticket, name in program, reception  
Guitar — \$75 **Two** tickets, name in program, reception  
Banjo — \$150 **Four** tickets, name in program, reception  
Piano — \$300 **Eight** tickets, name in program, reception  
Hammer Dulcimer — \$500 **Sixteen** tickets, name in program, reception

To become a sponsor, or if you have any questions about sponsorships, call 572-1307 or email [keith.werner@sbc-global.net](mailto:keith.werner@sbc-global.net).

To volunteer to help promote the concert or to help on the evening of the concert, call Ken Schroeder, 526-2303.

Visit John's website: <http://folkmusic.com/news/>

## Father Roy Bourgeois and SOA Watch nominated for Nobel Peace Prize

By JOHN MEYER, American Friends Service Committee

Father Roy Bourgeois, MM, and School of the Americas Watch (SOA Watch) have been nominated for one of the most prestigious awards in the world - the Nobel Peace Prize - for their sustained faithful nonviolent witness against the disappearances, torture, and murder of hundreds of thousands of civilians (peasants, community and union organizers, clerics, missionaries, educators, and health workers) by foreign military personnel trained by the U.S. military at U.S. taxpayer expense at the School of the Americas at Fort Benning, Georgia.

The candidacy of Father Roy and SOA Watch for the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize has been officially submitted to the Nobel Committee in Oslo, Norway by the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), a Nobel Peace Prize Laureate. The official announcement was made on Sunday, November 22 at 9 a.m. at the gates of Fort Benning (home of the School of the Americas) during the annual November vigil to close the SOA.


"We are deeply honored, and deeply humbled, to be

nominated for this prize for peace," commented Bourgeois, a Vietnam veteran, Purple Heart recipient and Catholic priest, who helped found SOA Watch. "This nomination is a recognition of the work of the thousands struggling against militarism across the Americas."

SOA Watch is a nonviolent grassroots movement that works through creative protest and resistance, legislative and grassroots media work to stand in solidarity with the people of Latin America, to close the School of the Americas (renamed the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation) and to change oppressive U.S. foreign policy that institutions like the SOA/ WHINSEC represent.

On the weekend of November 22, SOA Watch gathered by the thousands at Ft. Benning's gates to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the killings of 14-year-old Celia Ramos, her mother Elba Ramos, and the six Jesuit priests she worked with at the Central American University in San Salvador in November 1989.

Info: [info@soaw.org](mailto:info@soaw.org)



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# Rivers of Birds, Forests of Tules: Central Valley Nature & Culture in Season

By Lillian Vallee

## 61. Sticky-tongued Flickers & Poets with Dirty Hands

A quiet rain sweetens the air and glazes the streets as I struggle to put into words the mysterious fall movements of poets and birds. The Northern Flicker (*Colaptes auratus*) has reappeared with his searching cry and early morning drumming. He (the mustache tells me) drinks at the birdbath and probes the deeply grooved bark of the Valley Oaks before hitting the ground to eat his favorite food, ants, reeled in on his sticky, barbed tongue. The yard is full of migrating birds, and the occasional Sharp-shinned Hawk (*Accipiter striatus*) who preys on them, but the almost daily winter presence of the Flicker and his tangerine take-offs lend the garden a holiday air.

Mortality keeps birds and poets on the move and hunger keeps them busy. During the day we clean and dry wild rose hips; shell and leach acorns; roast walnuts and pumpkin seeds with rosemary and thyme. We leave the highest apples in the trees for mockingbirds and jays.

Poetry ripples through the garden and fuses with whatever goes on there: the unfolding of the last roses, the cosmic energy of old trees, the communion of weather, and the contributions of the compost heap. “We are all candidates for composting,” declares the poet Stanley Kunitz in his masterly book on gardening and poetry, *The Wild Braid*, “so we cannot approach the compost heap without a feeling of connection.”

I turn to Stanley Kunitz and *The Wild Braid* because I can no longer separate my ideas about poems from ideas about my garden, and, in him, find a kindred spirit. “The garden is not only an ornamental place,” the poet writes, “but a habitat and a civilization.” A garden that pays no attention to the land “before alterations,” that does not “fit into that landscape and reflect it in some way,” is “an invasion, an occupation.”

Kunitz warns gardeners (and poets) away from too much domestication: “The danger is that you can so tame your garden that it becomes a *thing*. It becomes *landscaping*.” And poems, too, are in danger of having their essence pared away by too much subjugation: “You must be very careful not to deprive the poem of its wild origin.” Order should not deprive the poem of “its tang, its liberty, its force.”

I also turned to Stanley Kunitz and *The Wild Braid* because someone asked me an innocent question, the kind that probably did people in during the Spanish Inquisition. How would you define poetry? After a number of unsatisfying answers (surface area in inverse proportion to density of meaning, a lyrical generosity, language arranged to replicate an encounter with the mystery of being) I finally settled on “language gone to seed.”

“I associate the garden with the whole experience of being alive,” writes Kunitz, “and so, there

is nothing in the range of human experience that is separate from what the garden can signify in its eagerness and its insistence, and in its driving energy to live—to grow, to bear fruit.” Not that a garden needs to be in fruit or flower to have meaning: “There’s a sense that unless something’s in bloom, nothing is going on, it’s dead in the garden. People talk about a plant being ‘done’—‘the salvia’s done for the season’—as if blooming is all a plant has to do. That’s a complete fallacy and limitation.... There are areas in the garden that are in no way reliant on bloom.”

According to Kunitz poems (and gardens) need secrets and silence. “In so many instances, the poem is muddled by too much explanation, too much exposure. What one is aiming for is the indication of an energy, or a spirit, below the surface, in the *secret vaults of the self*.... That’s why I’ve always believed that so much of the energy of the poem comes from the secrets and is most beautiful when it is just about ready to unfold.... What bothers me about so much contemporary poetry is that there is none of that secrecy; it is all exposition, all revelation. I find that to be a diminishing factor.”

*The Wild Braid* includes photos of the poet in his garden. Some show him studying a fern or carrying tin pails. The most moving photo is taken from the back and shows only the poet’s two hands, left clasping the right wrist, fingertips caked with dirt.

“Language,” writes Kunitz, “has to be a sensuous instrument: it cannot be a completely rational one. In rhythm and sound, for example, language has the capacity to transcend reason; it’s all like erotic play.” And so much of the creative life, he believed, had its source in the erotic impulse, “so basic to human experience that we can never be free from it, even in old age.”

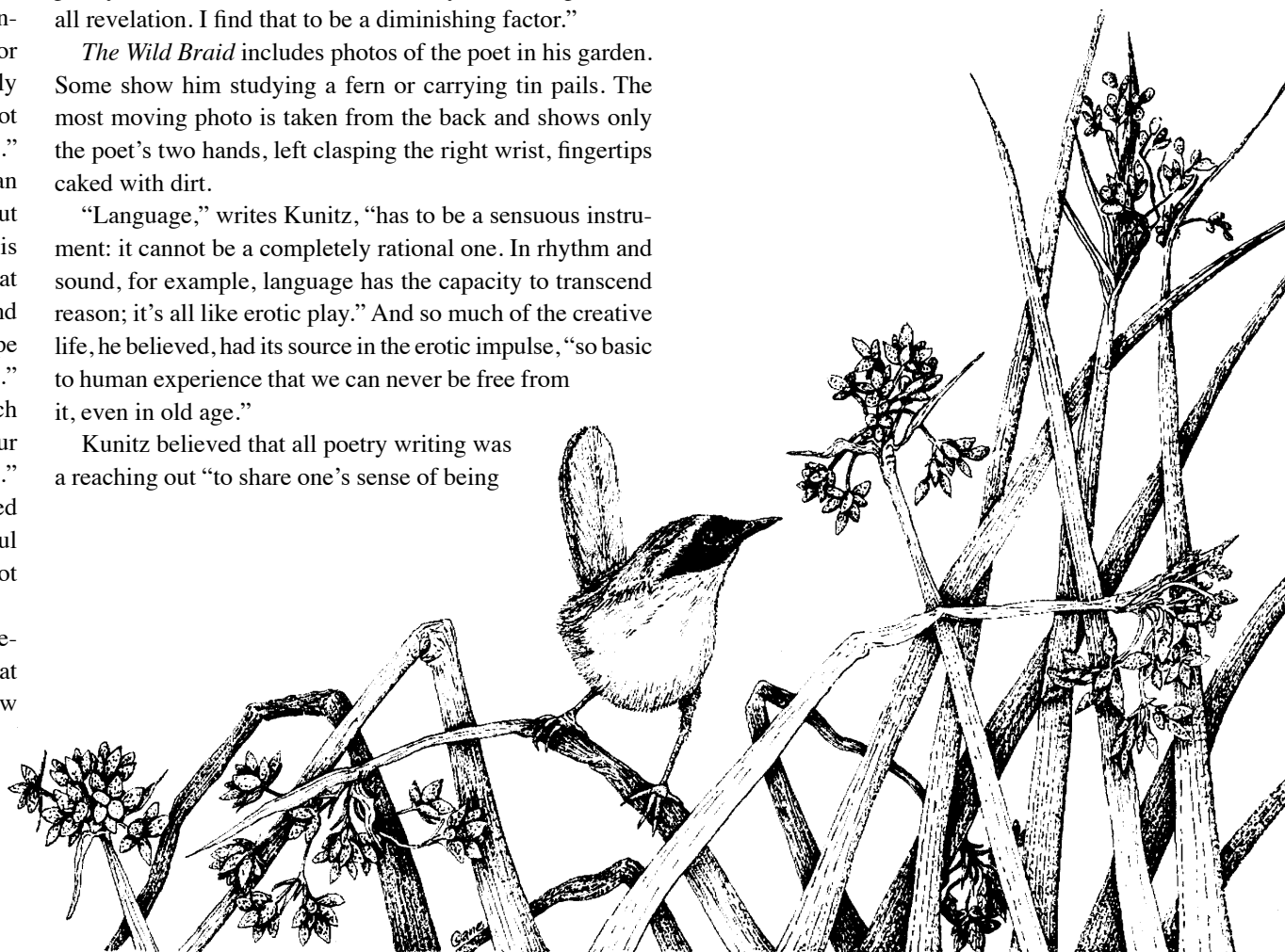
Kunitz believed that all poetry writing was a reaching out “to share one’s sense of being

with others.” “If you solve your problems and speak of them truly, you are of help to others, that’s all. And it becomes a moral obligation.” Thus poetry works in two dimensions, the private and public.

“In a sense, all creativity is a process of giving meaning to what is one a universal scale meaningless. The plant and the poet and the gardener collect these disparate, disorganized raindrops, sun rays, passing birds, and make something formal.” In the rhythm between lengthening nights full of inchoate desire and garden days full of hunger and wing-beat, poems are born: “What makes the engine go?/Desire, desire, desire./The longing for the dance/stirs in the buried life.”

I don’t know about you, but I always trust poets with dirty hands.

**Sources:** Stanley Kunitz: *The Wild Braid: A Poet Reflects on a Century in the Garden*.



# International Charter for Compassion launches to promote the Golden Rule

Edited with contributions

by Luella Cole and James Costello

WASHINGTON, Nov. 12 /PRNewswire/ – Karen Armstrong, winner of the 2008 TED prize, along with religious leaders from around the world, gathered at the National Press Club to unveil the Charter for Compassion ([www.charterforcompassion.org](http://www.charterforcompassion.org)). The Charter is a single document crafted by people from all walks of life, nationalities, beliefs and backgrounds with the intent to unify, inspire and bring compassion back into the heart of society.

As Ms. Armstrong explains, “Compassion is not the feeling of good will or pity. Instead it is the principled determination to put ourselves into the place of the other [that] lies at the heart of all truly religious and ethical systems.”

See the full text of the Charter for Compassion in the accompanying article.

Many different events to commemorate the launch of the Charter took place across the globe from Australia and South Africa to Argentina and Thailand with more than 100 partner organizations.

During the Charter-writing period, people of all faiths from around the world contributed their ideas, suggestions and stories through the website created for that purpose. Every contribution is available on the Charter for Compassion website.

“Compassion is not a passive state—it moves us, and movement begets action. It is the act of wanting to make right, to make better, to make good, to hold, to comfort, to teach, to guide, to encourage all manner of life,” wrote contributor Na’ama Yehuda.

“The Greek word ‘oikoumenikos’ is the root of the English word ‘ecumenical’, and means ‘of the inhabited earth’. It is about co-existing and co-creation with all the beings that are living on this globe,” said Belgian contributor Els Van Sonhoven.

James Elliott wrote from France: “Compassion isn’t always soothing and warm, it isn’t always about feeling good and happy, it can be tough and uncomfortable, but it always has meaning that goes beyond self-centered interests.”

A group of eighteen renowned religious thinkers and leaders met in Vevey, Switzerland in February, 2009, to review the contributions and write the final version of the Charter. Members of the Council included **Salman Ahmad**, artist, humanitarian and social activist, medical doctor, UN goodwill

ambassador for HIV/AIDS; **Ali Asani**, of Harvard, teacher of Islamic mysticism and Islamic civilizations; **Rev. Dr. Joan Brown Campbell**, Director of the US Office of the World Council of Churches; **Sadhvi Chaitanya**, a spiritual director of the Vedic Arsha Vijnana Mandiram ashram; **Bishop John Bryson Chane**, Episcopal Bishop of Washington; **Sister Joan Chittister**, a Benedictine Sister, co-chair of the Global Peace Initiative of Women, co-chair of the Network of Spiritual Progressives; **Sheikh Ali Gomaa**, the Grand Mufti of the Arab Republic of Egypt; **Mohsen Kadivar**, a distinguished Shi’i Muslim thinker; **Dr. Chandra Muzaffar**, President of the International Movement for a Just World (JUST), in Malaysia; **Baroness Julia Neuberger**, Rabbi, and Chief Executive of the King’s Fund, an independent health charity; **Prof. Tariq Ramadan**, Professor of Islamic Studies at Oxford; **Rabbi David Saperstein**, Director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism; **Rabbi Awraham Soetendorp**, rabbi of the Reform Jewish Community of the Hague; **Peter Storey**, former Methodist Bishop from South Africa; **Tho Ha Vinh**, head trainer from the International Committee of the Red Cross and a Dharma teacher (Dharmacharya) in the Zen Buddhism of Thich Nhat Hanh; **Tu Weiming**, Harvard-Yenching Professor of Chinese History and Philosophy; **Archbishop Desmond Tutu**, a leader for justice and Nobel laureate; and **Jean Zaru**, presiding clerk of the Ramallah Friends Meeting in Palestine.

A 2008 TED Prize winner, Karen Armstrong is one of the world’s leading religious thinkers. Her writings explore the commonalities among Christianity, Judaism and Islam. Calling herself a “freelance monotheist” she advocates for global ecumenism and understanding. Her award-winning wish, embedded in her speech to the 2008 TED Conference, was:

*“I wish that you would help with the creation, launch and propagation of a Charter for Compassion, crafted by a group of leading inspirational thinkers from the three Abrahamic traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam and based on the fundamental principles of universal justice and respect.”*

Ms. Armstrong has been working since February 2008 with the TED community to create the Charter for Compassion (<http://www.tedprize.org/karen-armstrong/>)

TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design) brings together, annually, the world’s most fascinating thinkers and doers who are challenged to give the talk of their lives in 18 minutes. TED.com makes the best talks, performances, and ideas worth spreading, available free to the public. The TED Prize is awarded annually to three exceptional individuals who each receive \$100,000 and, much more important, the granting of “One Wish to Change the World.”

The Fetzer Institute is the primary sponsor of the Charter. **ACTION:** Visit the Charter for Compassion website: <http://charterforcompassion.org> for information: to Learn about the Charter, Share the message, and Act with compassion. Visit <http://www.ted.com/> and the Fetzer Institute at <http://charterforcompassion.org/learn/partners/fetzer-institute>



## Charter for Compassion

[charterforcompassion.org](http://charterforcompassion.org)

November 12, 2009

*The principle of compassion lies at the heart of all religious, ethical and spiritual traditions, calling us always to treat all others as we wish to be treated ourselves. Compassion impels us to work tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of our fellow creatures, to dethrone ourselves from the centre of our world and put another there, and to honour the inviolable sanctity of every single human being, treating everybody, without exception, with absolute justice, equity and respect.*

*It is also necessary in both public and private life to refrain consistently and empathically from inflicting pain. To act or speak violently out of spite, chauvinism, or self-interest, to impoverish, exploit or deny basic rights to anybody, and to incite hatred by denigrating others - even our enemies - is a denial of our common humanity. We acknowledge that we have failed to live compassionately and that some have even increased the sum of human misery in the name of religion.*

*We therefore call upon all men and women ~ to restore compassion to the centre of morality and religion ~ to return to the ancient principle that any interpretation of scripture that breeds violence, hatred or disdain is illegitimate ~ to ensure that youth are given accurate and respectful information about other traditions, religions and cultures ~ to encourage a positive appreciation of cultural and religious diversity ~ to cultivate an informed empathy with the suffering of all human beings, even those regarded as enemies.*

*We urgently need to make compassion a clear, luminous and dynamic force in our polarized world. Rooted in a principled determination to transcend selfishness, compassion can break down political, dogmatic, ideological and religious boundaries. Born of our deep interdependence, compassion is essential to human relationships and to a fulfilled humanity. It is the path to enlightenment, and indispensable to the creation of a just economy and a peaceful global community.*



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# Afghanistan and the “Other” Vietnam War

By DALLAS DARLING, truthout Op-Ed

When discussing the Vietnam War or comparing it to America's other conflicts, such as the current one in Afghanistan, the “other” Vietnam War is rarely mentioned. This is very unfortunate, because it might be just the correct path to pursue in seeking a peaceful solution.

And much like President Barack Obama, who inherited the hostilities in Afghanistan, then-President Johnson inherited the Vietnam War. As the war dragged on, some personal aides claimed Johnson was never more ecstatic over Vietnam than when pledging to send billions of dollars to help toward construction and agricultural projects and the economic growth of Southeast Asia and the Mekong River region.(1)

In a speech in 1965, Johnson said that “impressive power” was not the guns and bombs, the rockets and the warships, for they are all symbols of human failure and a witness to human folly. Instead, what is impressive is a dam built across a great river, or providing electricity, or a rich harvest in a hungry land, or the sight of healthy children.(2)

President Johnson had actually grown up in the “hill country” of central Texas and had witnessed extreme poverty firsthand. While teaching in Cotulla, he noticed how many children arrived at school either hungry or ill-clothed. Because of this, they were often listless and had difficulties learning. He started a free breakfast program and believed deeply in social action.

It was also one of the reasons that, as President, he declared an “unconditional war on poverty in America.” The Johnson administration would be the architects of the Great

Society, or trying to establish a more equitable and egalitarian America. Medicare and Medicaid, Project Head Start, the Housing and Urban Development Act and the Office of Economic Opportunity decreased poverty and provided more educational chances.

President Johnson wanted to expand this vision to include Vietnam, so he met with Vietnam's Premier Ky and General Thieu. After the conference, Johnson issued a joint statement claiming that the US was going to establish and maintain a stable, viable economy and build a better material life for the Vietnamese - a true democracy.(3)

Johnson referred to it as his Open Arms Program, or the “Other War,” and counseled with economic and agricultural experts on how to develop rice farming, irrigation techniques, schools, clinics and improved nutrition and health programs. He also wanted it to be a grassroots movement, something the Vietnamese would initiate.(4)

Unfortunately, like some of the Great Society programs, the Open Arms Program, or the “Other War,” faltered. Pacification - militarily forcing people from their homes and putting them in controlled hamlets with checkpoints, won out over the Marshall Plan for Vietnam. So did carpet bombing, Agent Orange and massive aerial assaults.

Recently, it was reported that President Obama has narrowed down his Afghanistan strategy to four options. Rumors have speculated the options to be either a 20,000-25,000 troop escalation, a 45,000 troop escalation or a compromise of 34,000. No one knows, or is discussing, the fourth possible option.

President Obama might want to consider more funding for the “other war” in Afghanistan, or the building of more schools, clinics and roads, and the development of agriculture and small industry. He could start in secured areas that



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would serve as an example and model to other territories in Afghanistan, including the Nuristan Triangle. He may also want to seek assistance from Islamic missions and development programs.

It costs approximately \$500,000 each year to train, equip, feed, house and transport one US soldier in Afghanistan. Instead of sending 45,000 more troops, why not spend billions more dollars on improving the quality of life for the people in Afghanistan? And if this plan fails, would it not be better to have books and farm equipment fall into the hands of the Taliban instead of bombs and military weapons?

One thing was certain in Vietnam, and also now in Afghanistan: war does not establish a more peaceful society. Neither does it win the hearts and minds of people. A true and lasting democracy can only be built with roads, schools, construction projects and employment. These, “not mighty arms,” as President Johnson said, are the real achievements which America believes to be impressive.(5)

(1) Miller, Merle. Lyndon, *An Oral Biography*. New York, New York: Ballantine Books, 1980. p. 565.

(2) Ibid., p. 565.

(3) Ibid., p. 566.

(4) Ibid., p. 566.

(5) Ibid., p. 565.

<http://www.truthout.org/1114095>

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# Admiral Mullen announces Afghanistan strategy: Prepare to nonviolently resist: the Peaceable Assembly Campaign

By JEFF LAYS

This past Wednesday, Admiral Mullen (Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff) announced that the Pentagon will seek additional war funds for the Iraq and Afghanistan wars in 2010. While he did not give a firm dollar amount, *The New York Times* reported that defense budget analysts are kicking around the number of \$50 billion. The *Times* also reported that Jack Murtha, Chair of the Defense Subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee, indicated on October 30 that he expects the supplemental spending bill for 2010 to be in the range of \$40 billion. The final dollar amount won't be known until the White House submits its "emergency" supplemental spending request to Congress, most likely around February 2.

In the immortal words of Coach Vince Lombardi: "What the hell is going on out there?"

We should be so lucky if it were a simple matter of the Green Bay Packers screwing up the power sweep.

Instead, it's a matter of the Obama Administration now leading us down the path of the most expensive year in war funding since President Bush began the so-called "Global War on Terror" (now morphed into the "Overseas Contingency Operations" under President Obama).

You read that correctly. War spending in 2010 will exceed \$190 billion if indeed the Pentagon seeks—and Congress approves—\$50 billion in "emergency" funding. That's more than the \$179 billion spent under President Bush in 2008, the previous high water mark for war spending. War spending in 2010 will also far exceed spending in 2009 (which is about \$145 billion).

While Admiral Mullen did not announce a new war strategy for Afghanistan, it is difficult to conceive for what this additional \$40 to \$50 billion will be used if not used to expand the war in Afghanistan (and to perhaps continue the occupation of Iraq at near current troop levels without the substantive reductions promised earlier this year).

Let's compare the numbers from 2009 to 2010 for three key areas of spending: Personnel costs; Operation and Maintenance costs; and Procurement costs.

Funding levels in 2009 were: Personnel - \$19.9 billion; Operation and Maintenance - \$80.4 billion; and Procurement - \$31.9 billion.

Current funding levels in 2010 are: Personnel - \$14.1 billion; Operation and Maintenance - \$80.3 billion; and Procurement - \$22.2 billion. (With all the talk about building Afghanistan's army and police forces, it is worth noting that spending on the Afghanistan Security Forces Fund increases from \$5.6 billion in 2009 to \$6.6 billion in 2010, so it's not likely that the "emergency" supplemental will include significantly more funds for this category).

Total funding levels in these three main areas are approximately \$15.6 billion less in 2010 than in 2009. While Procurement funding declines in 2010 compared to 2009, this decline is most likely the result of returning to a more normative definition of what constitutes "emergency" war spending than the very expansive definition that was implemented

under President Bush and that resulted in the explosion of Procurement spending to approximately \$45 billion in both 2007 and 2008 (Procurement spending in 2005 was \$18 billion and in 2006 it was \$22.9 billion before this expansion).

The Congressional Research Service notes in a September 2009 report that the President's budget for 2010 includes both the increase in troop levels in Afghanistan to 69,000 ordered by President Obama earlier this year and the anticipated reduction in U.S. troop levels in Iraq through August 2010.

That leads one to ask the question:

In announcing that the Pentagon intends to seek additional war funding for 2010, did Admiral Mullen tip the hat that President Obama intends to dramatically increase the level of U.S. troop levels in Afghanistan—edging towards that 40,000 additional troops that General McChrystal seems to be requesting?



Or that the U.S. intends to otherwise dramatically increase the level of combat operations in Afghanistan and into Pakistan, which would carry the potential for significant increased costs in Operations and Maintenance as well as in Procurement funds?

Or that the U.S. intends to maintain troop levels in Iraq near current levels for the remainder of 2010?

Mullen's statement comes within the context of Obama's speech to service members in which he said that the U.S. would not send members of the military into harm's way without adequate resources. It comes within the context of Obama assuming personal responsibility for his decisions as commander-in-chief when he became the first U.S. President in decades to personally participate in the ceremonies at Dover upon the return of U.S. service members who died in war. The sequencing of events seems to be preparing the way for President Obama to issue the order to dramatically increase U.S. troop levels and combat operations in Afghanistan.

Somehow we must reinvigorate the antiwar movement that seems to have largely gone missing over these past several months.

One campaign under way to rise to the challenge is the Peaceable Assembly Campaign ([www.peaceableassemblycampaign.org](http://www.peaceableassemblycampaign.org)).

From January 19 through February 2, 2010, the PAC will maintain a two week vigil at the White House and engage in regular acts of nonviolent civil disobedience, starting on the day President Obama enters his second year in office, continuing through his anticipated State of the Union address to Congress, and concluding on the day he is to submit his budget for 2011 to Congress.

Then after February 2, the Peaceable Assembly Campaign will focus its work upon Congress. Similar to the Occupation Project effort of 2007, the PAC will organize lobbying—both legal and extralegal (i.e., civil disobedience)—in the home offices of Representatives and Senators who do not commit themselves publicly to oppose additional funding for the wars and occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as the occupation of the Palestinian territories.

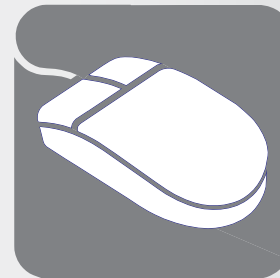
You can become involved with the Peaceable Assembly Campaign at [www.peaceableassemblycampaign.org](http://www.peaceableassemblycampaign.org)

Now is not the time to equivocate in our opposition to the continuing and expanding wars. The die is being cast by the Obama Administration. It is our choice on how we respond. And rather than being directed at the Administration, perhaps we should direct Coach Lombardi's challenge to ourselves. After all...

What the hell IS going on out here?

Voices for Creative Nonviolence email: [info@vcnv.org](mailto:info@vcnv.org)

From Creative Voices for Nonviolence, <http://vcnv.org/admiral-mullen-announces-afghanistan-strategy-prepare-to-nonviolently-resist>



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## Far from Home

Owlless unarmored bare  
Headed empty handed  
She has trouble with her siblings and  
Gives her father a headache  
In her guise of mortal grime  
Perhaps she'll accept a  
Gift of wine or a ride but  
She's far from Olympus  
And it's a long way back home

© Mark Nicoll-Johnson

## The Four Inner Planets Viewed by Jupiter

Taking a break the messenger  
Mercury has parked his celestial  
bicycle in the parking lot

Wary Venus more modestly dressed than  
on her birthday but less demure  
eyes the outer planets

Gaze averted as if seated in some  
baroque fountain humble Earth  
pretends introspection

In the equinoctial glare Mars  
shields his eyes behind  
wraparound ballistic shades

© Mark Nicoll-Johnson

## Urban Wilderness Interface

Before I can ask the raccoons about it  
They drop into the dark  
Storm drain at the end of the street.

Aside from their usual scolding  
The jays added nothing the next afternoon.  
The doves flutter heavily to safety  
And offer no comment.

I ask the hot July wind blowing  
From the north. It laughs in  
My face and points south

To the wild ranges surrounding  
The cities where students of ashes  
And flames ask the same questions.

© Mark Nicoll-Johnson

## January, Taipei County

1.  
Robed in gray the monks stepped from their vans  
with a pink ribboned poodle  
in front of the temple of the Clearwater Patriarch  
as we walked across the square to the  
lion guarded foot bridge and over the river.

At the base of the levees winter gardens.  
Boys played in bamboo thickets and called out  
to us "How are you?" Old men watched the  
building of one more bridge to  
span Sanxia River.

2.  
The temple the bridge the river  
all their dragons behind us we  
stood on the platform in the afternoon

found the boarding point  
for our car watched the  
crowd of passengers grow and

read behind the yellow band  
in the concrete below the ideograms  
this warning in English  
"Don't transcend while waiting."

© Mark Nicoll-Johnson

## Day 41

Depending on when your year  
Begins day 41 might fall  
In February or in this

Case June the sun might  
Shine or not you might  
Make a dollar or none

In the twenty-three hour drug  
Store parking lot you might  
Ask for a dollar and

I might give you one  
Or none or nineteen if  
You say the right words

And that's all I have  
If you're lucky like Miss  
Easley on day 41 when

The clouds part the camera  
Will catch you laughing with  
One broken cigarette and three

Dollars in your two hands

© Mark Nicoll-Johnson



## How to Read a Poem

In a hilly suburban Tacoma neighborhood one August night,  
moved by forces we will never know, a large toad  
ambled across a road and was squashed flat just shy of the center  
line by a succession of passing station wagons, the drivers  
heedless of impact. Mercifully, he never knew what hit him.  
The next day, baking in the sun the toad corpse  
ripened. Children venturing from houses gawked and poked.  
Adults wondered "What's that?" and quickly forgot.  
None wished to go near.

In the afternoon a dog followed her  
nose through the streets to the fatal spot. She breathed in the  
essence of toad, asphalt, summer sun from all angles. She rolled,  
rubbing coarse-furred shoulders and spine in the toadslick on the  
hot pavement, rejoicing, and trotted off with a new dignity.

© Mark Nicoll-Johnson



## Mark Nicoll-Johnson

Mark Nicoll-Johnson was born and raised in Los Angeles. He has an AB (Occidental College) and an MA (University of Oregon) in comparative literature. He has also studied at CSU Stanislaus and UC Davis.

A resident of Modesto since 1980, he has been active in the Fremont Open Plan Parent Advisory Group and as a classroom volunteer, and a poet-teacher for the California Poets in the Schools. At one time or another he has taught at all grade levels in local schools and at Modesto Junior College, CSU Stanislaus and UC Davis. Since 1990 he has been on the faculty in the Department of English at Merced College, where he has also served as a member and chief of the Merced College Faculty Association's negotiating team.

His work has appeared in *Hardpan* and *In the Grove*, and in a chapbook, *3 x 3: Nine Poems from L.A.* (Weather Bird Press 1982). He lives in Modesto with his wife Teri.

Photo by Richard Anderson, Collision II Reception and Reading at the Photographers Gallery, October 15, 2009.

## WE GET LETTERS



### A response to "Population, choice, and poverty."

I was very surprised to open up Stanislaus Connections to read November's article expressing Margaret and Louis DeMott-Feldman's opinion on population, choice and poverty. They believe intense poverty, not caused by natural disaster, is due to the totally irresponsible decision to have too many children. They believe aid should not be given to these persons/countries unless they adopt a one-child per-family law which should not occur until after the age of 28.

I agree that population control is an urgent issue. How we can humanely and cooperatively work together with other cultures, countries and individuals to control overpopulation? That is what was missing from their article.

As a nurse practitioner who has provided birth control, it was obvious to me that many women do not choose, personally, to have more children. Many women are victims of a

culture where men make the decision to procreate. They keep track of their partner's menstrual cycles, throw away their birth control pills, do not allow their partners to be seen alone for a consultation or physical exam, or they simply refuse to allow them to go to a clinic for birth control. This occurs daily here in the Central Valley. Of course, there are the horrific cases of rape, whether it be in confines of marriage or as a result of war or incest. Should those women and their children not be given aid?

Others belong to a religion that forbids birth control. Do we have the right to discriminate against men or women who believe they should not interfere with their understanding of God's plan?

Other women lack the education to be able to use birth control or to even know it exists. One woman with 4 children has no idea how she became pregnant. She was interested in birth control but she and many other women and teens have difficulty reliably using birth control. Moreover, NO method is 100% effective in preventing pregnancy even when used correctly.

Are we not an organization of individuals who seek peace and justice? How can we withhold aid to those who are most in need? With our financial, medical and educational support and cultural understanding we can control overpopulation but it should be done humanely.

**Mimsie Minor Farrar, RN, MSN, FNP**  
Modesto

## Healthcare

... from page 1

We're hearing that large numbers of lower-income Americans will be provided with Medicaid coverage in the next decade. Translation: If funding holds up, they'll get to hang onto a bottom rung of the healthcare ladder. Many will not be able to get the medical help they need, from primary care providers or specialists.

Not long ago, we were told that the Obama administration was aiming for a public option that could provide coverage to one out of every four Americans. Now the figure is around one out of every fifty.

Not long ago, the idea was that taxpayer-funded subsidies were to be used only for the public option. But now the entire concept has been hijacked by and for the private insurance industry. As House Speaker Nancy Pelosi put it on October 8, private insurance companies "are going to get 50 million new consumers, many of them subsidized by the taxpayers."

Pelosi was making the argument that the least the insurance industry could do, in return, would be to accept a higher level of taxation. But her comment was a telling acknowledgment that all the "public option" proposals now provide a massive funnel from the U.S. Treasury to the insurance conglomerates. The individual mandate is a monumental giveaway to private insurance firms.

The specter of "healthcare reform" that requires individuals to stretch their personal finances for often-abysmal insurance coverage is the worst of all worlds — government intrusion for corporate benefit without any guarantees of decent health coverage.

In effect, the individual-mandate requirement tells people that obtaining health coverage is ultimately their own responsibility — and the quality of the coverage is beside the point. In essence, when it comes to guaranteeing quality healthcare

for all, the gist of the policy is: "Let's not, and say we did."

The predictable result is reinforcement of vast — and often deadly — inequities in access to healthcare.

With Washington making such a corporate mess of "healthcare reform," the best way to get what we need — healthcare for all as a human right — will be to enact single-payer healthcare in one state after another.

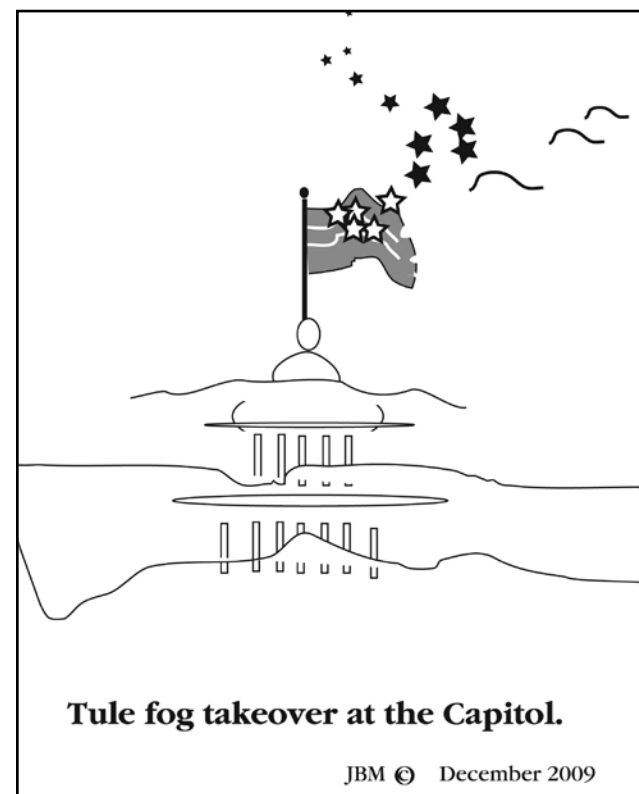
But the House Democratic leadership has not been content to serve up a grimly pathetic "healthcare reform" bill. Speaker Pelosi has used her political leverage to quash Congressman Dennis Kucinich's amendment — approved months ago by the Education and Labor Committee — that would grant waivers so that states could create their own single-payer system. Pelosi removed the Kucinich amendment from the House bill.

The California legislature has twice passed a strong single-payer bill, both times vetoed by the state's current execrable governor. The official position of the California Democratic Party is unequivocally in favor of single-payer healthcare. And yet Nancy Pelosi, a California Democrat, did what she could to sabotage the single-payer position of her own party in her own state.

Sickening.

Norman Solomon's book, *War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death* has been adapted into a documentary film of the same name. His most recent book is *Made Love, Got War*. He is a national co-chair of the Healthcare NOT Warfare campaign. In California, he is co-chair of the Commission on a Green New Deal for the North Bay, [www.GreenNewDeal.info](http://www.GreenNewDeal.info)

From <http://www.commondreams.org/view/2009/11/05>



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# The Gaza Freedom March and HR 867

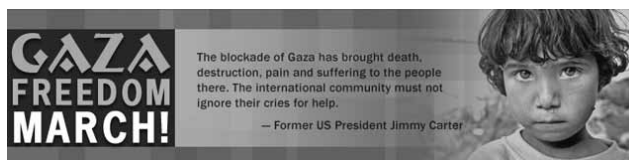
By JOSHUA BROLIER

At a time when the United States House of Representatives has just voted to deny the existence of the well documented Israeli war crimes committed against the people of Gaza during Operation Cast Lead, The International Coalition to End the Illegal Siege on Gaza is planning a non-violent demonstration and march from Gaza to Israel's border demanding that the Israel lift the brutal blockade that has crippled nearly every sector of Palestinian life.

Despite the overwhelming international consensus on the fairness and viability of the UN Fact Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict, the United States rejected the 452 pages of evidence given by the UN Mission led by Justice Richard Goldstone, a Jewish South African. The United States refuses to admit that the three billion dollars it sends to Israel in military aid each year might be used for anything other than most exemplary behavior in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Of course, with the United States engaged in two occupations and wars that have given rise to over one million casualties, it is understandable that the United States would not blink an eye at the 1,400 Palestinian lives lost during Operation Cast Lead.

Though denial is typical in the United States when it comes to the pattern of Israel's war crimes, I was again shocked, dismayed and angered to see the pervasive lack of courage, integrity and compassion in the United States House of Representatives as they sweepingly passed the House Resolution 867 to condemn the UN Mission's Report on Operation Cast Lead. (The report was accepted in the UN General Assembly by a vote of 114-18.) The vote in the House of Representatives was a strong reminder that we can in no way rely on this unresponsive and calloused Congress to shape our vision for justice and a more humane society.

We are talking about a Congress of career-oriented and business-minded bureaucrats, Republicans and Democrats alike, who cannot see the moral ills of exporting Boeing Apache helicopters and F16 Eagle fighter planes, Lockheed Martin F-16 jets, CAT bulldozers, Hellfire missiles, Raytheon Bunker Buster missiles, indiscriminate DIME munitions, US Air Force cluster bombs and three billion dollars of military aid a year to Israel so that it can maintain apartheid and likely commit further egregious war crimes in Palestine.



This is a governmental body that has forfeited any supposed right to make decisions on my behalf. Waiting for Congress or President Obama to make a real move towards a just resolution between the nation of Israel and the people of Palestine is completely illogical based on their own resolutions, statements (or lack thereof), arms shipments and the United States' historical reputation of being a dishonest broker in previous peace talks.

That is why I am joining the Gaza Freedom March on December 27th. I can no longer sit by and watch as this country supports the military siege and economic strangulation of our sisters and brothers in Palestine through a blockade that does nothing to further long-term security for our Israeli sisters and brothers or to defend people here in the United States. Over 500 internationals (many Israelis included) and as many as 50,000 Palestinians are expected to take part in the Gaza Freedom March. Through direct action of common people united across borders, we will stand in solidarity with Palestinians and hope to help move towards a just, sustainable peace. With conditions deteriorating in Gaza, there is no time to trust in politicians or distant elections. It's time that the people determine the policies.

Free Gaza. End the siege. End the occupation.

Go to the Gaza Freedom March's Website, <http://www.gazafreedommarch.org/>

Read Justice Goldstone's response to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, <http://vcnv.org/judge-goldstone-on-h-res-867>

From Voices for Creative Nonviolence, <http://vcnv.org/the-gaza-freedom-march-and-hr-867>



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