

It's Not the Bad Guys—It's the Guns

By MYCHAL DENZEL SMITH

Since the December 14, 2012 shooting in Newtown, Connecticut that claimed 27 lives, children no older than five or six, there have been more than 900 gun-related deaths in the United States. It's in this context that President Barack Obama, joined by Vice President Joe Biden and children from the country who wrote letters to the president of the wake of the Newtown tragedy, announced his plans for what, if enacted, would be the most sweeping national gun control reforms in more than two decades.

The president signed 23 executive orders that, according to his statement, "help make sure information about potentially dangerous people who are barred from having guns is available to the national background check system; lift the ban on research into the causes of gun violence; make sure doctors know they can report credible threats of

violence by their patients; put more resource officers and counselors in schools; and ensure millions of Americans get quality mental health coverage." He also called on Congress to pass legislation that would, among other things, require background checks on all gun sales, ban military-style assault weapons and high capacity magazines, and provide funding to investigate the causes of violence. Federal legislation may look to the recent gun control law passed in the New York state legislature as a template. According to the New York Times, the New York law "broadens the assault weapons ban to include any semi-automatic with a detachable magazine and one military-style feature" and "requires tighter registration and reporting of arms sales; background checks for all sales, including private ones; and re-certification requirements for gun owners."

These are the types of common-sense gun

control reforms Americans want to see. A Pew Research survey finds that 85 percent of the public favors background checks for private and gun show sales, 80 percent support for preventing those with mental illness from purchasing a gun, 67 percent support for a federal database that tracks guns sales, and 58 percent in favor of a ban on semi-automatic weapons. And I have no doubt these measures will reduce the number of mass shootings, but, alone they won't solve prevent nearly all gun deaths across the country.

NRA CEO Wayne LaPierre was deservedly mocked for his suggestion that "the only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun," but most popular reforms reflect exactly that thinking. Let's be honest: we're not having a conversation about how

to most effectively reduce gun violence, but rather about who has the right to own what type of gun. We want to identify the shooters before they have a chance to kill, and prevent them from having access to the most lethal weapons. We're taking guns out of the hands of some, while permitting others their own personal arsenal.

For instance, there is broad public support for preventing people with mental illnesses from owning guns. The New York law includes a provision requiring therapists to report to authorities any clients who they think are "likely to engage in" violent behavior. Could this provision prevent those

IT'S THE GUNS cont. p. 7

Desmond Tutu Blasts US Drones: American or Not, All Victims Are Human

'Does the US really want to tell those of us in the rest of the world that our lives are not of the same value as yours?'

By LAUREN MCCAULEY, staff writer, Common Dreams. org

In a letter to the New York Times published Wednesday [Feb. 12], South African Nobel Peace Prize laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu challenged the hypocrisy of the US and its citizens for accepting a killer drone program when it pertains to foreign suspects while demanding judicial review when those targets are American citizens.

He writes:

Do the United States and its people really want to tell those of us who live in the rest of the world that our lives are not of the same value as yours? That President Obama can sign off on a decision to kill us with less worry about judicial scrutiny than if the target is an American? Would your Supreme Court

really want to tell humankind that we, like the slave Dred Scott in the 19th century, are not as human as you are? I cannot believe it.

I used to say of apartheid that it dehumanized its perpetrators as much as, if not more than, its victims. Your response as a society to Osama bin Laden and his followers threatens to undermine your moral standards and your humanity.

Tutu was responding specifically to an earlier New York Times piece which discussed the idea of a "special court" or tribunal to review drone strikes against US citizens. Though not entirely new, the plan has gained momentum since last week's confirmation hearing of CIA director nominee John Brennan during which lawmakers, including Senators Diane Feinstein (D-Calif.) and Angus King (I-Maine), discussed the option.

During the hearing, Senator King reportedly said he thought the court "would pass constitutional muster only if it were limited to cases involving American citizens."

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You are invited to attend the
**2013 Peace Essay Contest
Awards Reception**

Friday, March 15

7:00 p.m.

at the

MJC West Campus
Mary Stuart Rodgers
Student Learning Center



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SAVE THE DATE:

Peace Camp, June 28-30

Save the date for the 31st annual Peace Camp on June 28-30 at Camp Peaceful Pines on Clark Fork Rd. off Hwy 108 in the Sierras.

We look forward to workshops, great food, hikes, campfires, singing, talent show, children's activities, crafts, table tennis, horseshoes, tetherball and other recreation, fresh air in a mountain setting, the wind in the pines and cedars, the starry nights, the labyrinth, and fascinating people. The camp is now buried in snow, but come June, the mountains will spring to life with wild flowers, birds and the babbling stream.

All ages, families, singles and new campers are welcome. Details coming soon...

Schroeder's brief bit of interesting info

% of votes nationwide in 2012 for Democratic congressional candidates: 49.15

% of votes nationwide in 2012 for Republican congressional candidates: 48.03

number of Democratic members of House of Representatives: 201

number of Republican members of House of Representatives: 234

— Ken Schroeder

Just Around the Corner, Modesto Poets' Corner Contest

By LYNN M. HANSEN, Chair, Poets' Corner Committee

The City of Modesto celebrates the art of poetry not only by appointing a Poet Laureate but also by sponsoring the annual Poets' Corner Contest for all adults and children that live or go to school in Stanislaus County. According to founding members, poet James Shuman and writer Colleen Stanley Bare, the idea of a Poets' Corner began in 1980-81 as a State-wide promotion by Claire J. Baker, a Bay-area member of National League of American Pen Women. The objective was to establish a tangible poets' place in each city, honoring local poets, with a committee that would be in charge of promoting poetry in their community. Additionally, the requirements were that the Poets' Corner be sponsored by the city and supported by the city government. Modesto was the third of fifteen cities in California that formed a Poets' Corner. For Modesto, the poets' place is a bower and two Victorian benches located in the north-west wall of the McHenry Mansion side gardens, now marked by two bronze plaques.

As was intended, thirty-two years after its inception, the Poets' Corner Contest continues as an annual event, supervised by the Poets' Corner Committee with municipal sponsorship by the City of Modesto, Division of Parks and Recreation, a Subcommittee of the Modesto Culture

Commission. The submission period for this year's contest is now open with two categories:

General: Poetry on any subject, in any style, including rhymed, unrhymed, free verse, sonnet, haiku (group of three accepted), ballad, etc.

Special Theme: Pets. Poetry in celebrating of pets which could include but not limited to a favorite pet, a family pet, an unusual pet or the pet I wished I had.

Children from grades 1-12 and adults of the community are invited to submit poems postmarked no later than by Wednesday March 13, 2013. Winners of the contest will be invited to read their works at the Poets' Corner Celebration upstairs in the McHenry Museum on Sunday May 19, 2013. Each author of a winning poem will receive an anthology of this year's Poets' Corner poems.

Submission Guidelines are available on the following website: www.modestogov.com/prnd/poet_corner.asp Copies of Poets' Corner Celebration Anthologies are kept in the main room of the McHenry Museum. Here, too, are books that local poets care to submit. The Poets' Corner is a living testimony that poetry thrives in Modesto, so sharpen your pencils, submit your poems and join the poetry community.

Annual Artist Open Studio Tour, April 6-7

Fifty-seven artists will be participating in this year's Stanislaus Artist Open Studio tour, happening Saturday and Sunday, April 6 and 7, between 11:00 a.m. and 5 p.m. on both days. The aim of the tour is for the public to see some of the creative process of local artists by inviting them into studios and homes where the artists work. The tour "ticket" is a booklet featuring each artist and a map of the 35 studios at which they will be displaying, demonstrating and selling their art. Each ticket/booklet is \$10, children 18 and under are free.

One exciting feature of the tour is an opportunity to WIN an original work of art by one of five local artists. The juried pieces were selected by Deanna Hunt, an art professor at University of the Pacific. Each artist is paid for their work, then the pieces are given away by a drawing that will be held after the tour weekend. The tour booklet contains an entry form that can be deposited at any studio on the tour.

A preview show will take place at the Gallo Center for the Arts on Thursday, April 4 between 10 a.m. and 6 p.m. Many



of the artists will bring a single piece to entice the public to come on the tour. Map booklets will be available for purchase.

Tour booklets are available beginning March 1st at locations in Modesto (Mistlin Gallery, Chartreuse Muse), Turlock (Carnegie Center, 1st Street Gallery) and Oakdale

(Chamber of Commerce), from the tour website and from artists and tour committee members. For information, visit the website at www.stanislausaos.wordpress.com, email openstudio.stanislaus@gmail.com or phone 209-222-TOUR.

The open studio tour is an initiative of the Stanislaus County Travel & Tourism Roundtable.

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Division I

First: **Josh Hutchings**, 12, Mrs. Ho, Oakdale Charter High School

Second: School Winner, **Monica Walker**, 11, Mrs. Sousa, Gregori High School

Third: School Winner, **Abigail Schmidt**, 11, Ben Middleton, Ceres High School

Honorable Mentions: , **Alick Liang**, 11, Ben Middleton, Ceres High School, **Ritu Malhotra**, 11, Ben Middleton, Ceres High School, School Winner, **Kaitlyn Slovek**, 11, Kelly Hayes, Whitmore Charter High, **Sebian C. Martinez-Escobar**, 11, Jennifer Periera, Modesto High School.

Finalists: **Natalie Banh**, 11, Mrs. Sousa, Gregori High School, **John Franzia**, 11, Mrs. Sousa, Gregori High School, **Navneet Kaur Grewal**, 11, Ben Middleton, Ceres High School, **Raquel Houlihan**, 11, Mrs. Sousa, Gregori High School, **Arcelia Hermosillo**, 11, Ben Middleton, Ceres High School, **Kelvin Lal**, 11, Mrs. Sousa, Gregori High School, **Morgan Lesan**, 11, Kelly Hayes, Whitmore Charter High, **Jasmine Prado**, 12, Mrs. McAndrews, Valley Oak High School, **Pietro Puducay**, 11, Ben Middleton, Ceres High School, **Kailani Ridenour**, 11, Mrs. Sousa, Gregori High School, **Ashlynn Slovek**, 11, Kelly Hayes, Whitmore Charter High, **Cristian Valencia**, 11, Mrs. Sousa, Gregori High School, **Ashlynn Walker**, 11, Kelly Hayes, Whitmore Charter High, **Jannah Walling**, 11, Kelly Hayes, Whitmore Charter High.

Division II

First: **Krupa Modi**, 10, Mike Chiavetta, Modesto High School

Second: School Winner, **Eliana Montalvo**, 10, Mrs. Barr, Whitmore Charter High

Third: School Winner, **Princess Pe**, 10, Kristen Ghimenti, Central Valley High School

Honorable Mentions: **Mia C. Martinez-Escobar**, 9, Maggie Monjure, Modesto High School, **Marian Pagaduan**, 10, Denise Springer, Oakdale High School, School Winner, **Shanell Silva**, 10, Marlene Dhallin, Denair High School.

Finalists: **Andrea Avalos**, 10, Kristen Ghimenti, Central Valley High School, **Zoe Bradley**, 9, Amy Simons, Oakdale Charter High School, **Andres Calderon**, 10, Kristen Ghimenti, Central Valley High School, **Kyndal Chapman**, 10, Ms. Davis, Ceres High School, **Ryan Enoki**, 10, Mrs. Barr, Whitmore Charter High, **Bianca Fernandez**, 10, Kristen Ghimenti, Central Valley High School, **Allison Iafrate**, 10, Ms. Ho, Oakdale Charter High School, **Haylee Jantz**, 10, Marlene Dhallin, Denair High School, **Bethany Manuel**, 9, Vicki Harmon, Keyes to Learning Charter School, **Yanise Nevarez**, 10, Ms. Davis, Ceres High School, **Kimberly Perez Pulido**, 10, Marlene Dhallin, Denair High School, **Peter Rodriguez**, 10, Mrs. Barr, Whitmore Charter High, **Jalyn Vander Wal**, 9, Mrs. Barr, Whitmore Charter High.

Division III

First: School Winner, **Taryn Lane**, 8, Ms. Wegener, Oakdale Jr. High

Second: School Winner, **Abigail Sloan**, 7, Susan Janis, Hart Ransom Academic Charter

Third: **Katie Romkee**, 7, Susan Janis, Hart Ransom Academic Charter

Honorable Mentions: **Avalon Perez**, 8, Susan Janis, Hart Ransom Academic Charter, School Winner, **Tanya Sarabia**, 8, Mr. Giffen, Glick Middle School, **Haley Takaki**, 8, Ms. Wegener, Oakdale Jr. High

Finalists: School Winner, **Joan Ashby**, 8, Maia Tobin, Prescott Jr. High., **Marlee Baker**, 7, Ms. Gill, Whitmore Charter, **Kyle Banh**, 8, Maia Tobin, Prescott Jr. High, **Marissa Bradley**, 8, Ms. Wegener, Oakdale Jr. High, **Amber Coston**, 8, Susan Janis, Independent Home School, **Isabella De Fine**, 7, Suzanne Bruce, Great Valley Academy, **Karissa Garcia**, 8, Ms. Wegener, Oakdale Jr. High, **Malina Gayton**, 8, Ms. Wegener, Oakdale Jr. High, **Diego Gonzalez**, 8, Ms. Wegener, Oakdale Jr. High, **McKenna Hager**, 8, Ms. Wegener, Oakdale Jr. High, **Candy Jauregui**, 8, Ms. Wegener, Oakdale Jr. High, **Vicente Nunez**, 8, Bev Broedlow, Great Valley Academy, School Winner, **William Scheid**, 7, Suzanne Bruce, Great Valley Academy, **Megan Swarthout**, 8, Ms. Wegener, Oakdale Jr. High

School Winners: **Adrian Ruiz**, 8, Creekside Middle School, Monika Teves, **Gina Longmire**, 7, Empire Elementary, Mrs. Colombo, **Ana Zepeda**, 8, Valley Home, Mr. Reid, **Inteus Schiavo**, 8, La Loma Jr. High, Mrs. Rosas

Division IV

First: School Winner, **Billy Gonzalez**, 5, Ms. Theodozio/Mrs David, Agnes M. Baptist Elementary

Second: School Winner, **Iraya Argonza Cress**, 6, Kathie Knudsen, Whitmore Charter School

Third: **Kylea Coston**, 5, Susan Janis, Independent Home School

Honorable Mentions: **Josh Acharya**, 5, Danielle Semara, University Charter School, **Mehar Nijjar**, 6, Mr. Carpenter/Mrs David, Agnes M. Baptist Elementary, **Marina Ortega-Madueno**, 6, Mr. Carpenter, Agnes M. Baptist Elementary

Finalists: **Lauren Arakelian**, 6, Mr. Carpenter/Mrs David, Agnes M. Baptist Elementary, **Charlize Badillo**, 5, Ms. Theodozio/Mrs David, Agnes M. Baptist Elementary, **Brianna Bostan**, 6, Mr. Carpenter/Mrs David, Agnes M. Baptist Elementary, **Lily Ferdinand**, 5, Ms. Theodozio/Mrs David, Agnes M. Baptist Elementary, School Winner, **Edwardo Flores**, 5, Ms. Scheller, Don Pedro Elementary, **Brandon Harris**, 6, Mr. Carpenter/Mrs David, Agnes M. Baptist Elementary, **Eden Hazlewood**, 5, Susan Janis, Hart-Ransom Academic Charter, **Arveen Kaur**, 6, Mr. Carpenter/Mrs David, Agnes M. Baptist Elementary, **Nirveen Kaur**, 6, Mr. Carpenter/Mrs David, Agnes M. Baptist Elementary, **Aimae Kehler**, 5, Susan Janis, Hart-Ransom Academic Charter, **Xavier Lucero**, 5, Ms. Theodozio/Mrs David, Agnes M. Baptist Elementary, School Winner, **Ishan Moundi**, 6, Mrs. White, Siphed Elementary, School Winner, **Ryan Schut**, 6, Todd Brownell, Fremont Open Plan, **Judah Sloan**, 5, Susan Janis, Hart-Ransom Academic Charter

School Winners: **Josephine Henderson**, 6, Lakewood Elementary, Mrs. Malekos-Quick, **Kalijah Santos**, 6, M. Robert Adkison Elementary, Miss Jeffrey, **Charlotte Jones**, 5, Northmead, Mrs. Eddings, **Laura Lotero**, 5, Mesa Verde Elementary, Mr. Haratani, **Emily Hansen**, 5, Hickman Charter Elementary, Mrs. Hultgren

First Place Peace Essay Contest ~ Division I: Josh Hutchings

Oakdale Charter High School ~ Mrs. Ho

America's Desperate Need for Energy Independence

November 16, 2012

Mr. President

The White House

1600 Pennsylvania Avenue

Washington, D.C. 20500

Mr. President,

One of your most important agendas as you begin your term in office needs to be the end of US dependency on oil which affects every American and the world as a whole. Peace cannot be attained with the major obstacle of oil dependency blocking our way. Renewable energy resources will provide the tools for a more peaceful and economically secure world.

US oil dependency is crippling our economy. Spiked oil prices over turmoil in the Middle East caused the three previous global recessions: "The 1973 Yom Kippur War [...] led to global stagflation (recession and inflation) in 1974-1975. The Iranian revolution in 1979 led to global stagflation in 1980-1982. And Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in the summer of 1990 led to the global recession of 1990-1991."¹ Each of these recessions puts more pressure on the American families by raising the cost of living, the price of food, as well as gas prices. Oil holds America hostage at every pump whenever the Middle East flares up and it cannot be allowed to throw America into turmoil again.

Oil is closely tied to war and conflict on a national and global scale. History has shown that oil wealth in oil producing countries ignites conflict. Despite an overall decrease in conflict worldwide, conflict in oil producing countries has not changed. In 2008, oil-producing countries were "host to about a third of the world's civil wars, both large and small, up from one-fifth in 1992."² Oil causes conflict in three primary ways: "Economic instability" leading to "political instability," providing wealth that "often helps support insurgencies," and "wealth encourag[ing] separatism" all creating the Middle East powder keg due to oil.³ The world's oil dependency deteriorates the stability of the Middle East and directly prevents peace.

However, new energy offers new jobs and the hope of energy independence. Energy businessman T. Boone Pickens suggests that natural gas can serve as a bridge fuel from oil to renewable energy.⁴ Found in abundance in America, natural gas provides a cheap, American based alternative fuel source. Whether we fund natural gas, wind, solar, or other budding energy sources, the job creation potential is huge. A study conducted for the "European Commission, says that a gross total of around 2.8 million jobs could be created in the renewable energy sector if the EU managed to meet its renewable energy targets for 2020."⁵ American potential jobs and GDP for American based energy could soar our economy again. The jobs created by green energy could greatly help revive

'Tis the Season

By JENIFER WEST

With only a few years of attempting to grow food year-round under my belt, I in no way claim to be a gardening expert. The pitiful results I had in my winter garden this year were certainly proof of that! However, the time that most folks think of as “the gardening season” is here, so I’d like to offer some things that I’ve learned so far.

The first, and most important thing, is to plan what you want to plant and where. And it doesn’t have to be in the ground – any container big enough to hold enough dirt for the roots of whatever plant you’d like to grow will do. (A general rule of thumb: allow approximately as much room for roots as there will eventually be plant above the ground.) Your container will need some drainage, so if it doesn’t already have them, poke a few holes in the bottom so your tomatoes, peppers or whatever won’t drown. You can plant in purchased containers, recycled 5-gallon buckets, or whatever other container is at hand. Anne Schellman, of the UC Cooperative Extension, has even taught a class on gardening in a wheelbarrow!

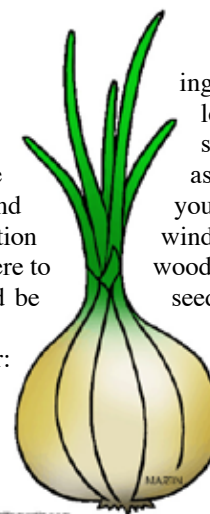
Whether you garden in a container or directly in the ground, choose a site that gets lots of sunshine – at least 6 hours a day, but more is better. Prepare the soil by adding compost, bone meal (the latter for tomatoes, peppers, and melons especially, but most veggies will appreciate it, as well), and, if your soil is dense, some looser material like humus. Work the amendments into the soil, smooth it out, and water thoroughly. (It’s a good sign if you come across worms as you work – means there’s already good stuff going on in there!) It’s important to water both before and after you plant, so that there’s less risk of your seeds or seedlings

drying out from one watering to the next.

Carefully consider what to plant where – you don’t want to plant corn, for example, in the south side of the garden, where it will shade the rest of the garden and reduce your yields of everything else! And tomatoes don’t mind being planted in the same location every year (so long as they were happy enough there to produce good yields), but everything else should be moved around from year to year.

One thing I learned the hard way this winter: Members of the allium family (onions, garlic, shallots, leeks) are excellent for pest control. Some kind of obnoxious green caterpillar mowed down just about everything I planted – except for a lone broccoli plant, as well as a few lettuce and spinach plants. Oh – and a whole bed of onions. Whatever those darned things were, they didn’t seem to like the spinach, and wouldn’t go near the lettuce planted next to the shallots. We were besieged by an army of the little critters last spring, too, so I’ve ordered an arsenal of “onion sets” – baby onions ready to be planted. They’re about the size of those pickled cocktail onions you can buy in the store, so they come up quickly and make very strong plants. I plan to ring my beds with them. One can always eat, share, store or pickle onions, so I’m not worried about having too many – I’d rather have too many onions to deal with than lose whole beds of everything else!

When your containers or beds are ready, and you’ve decided what to plant where, water again so that your soil is nicely moist, then go ahead and plant some of the early stuff: Carrots, beets, chard, potatoes, radishes and, if you’re feel-



ing brave, lettuce. (Bugs of all kinds love its velvety soft leaves!) I’ve even planted peas in March, with some success. You can generally plant tomatoes and peppers as soon as they appear in stores, but bear in mind that you’ll need to protect them from any late frost or heavy wind (the latter a frequent occurrence in my neck of the woods). Keep the soil moist once you’ve tucked in your seeds and seedlings. I’ve found that my seedlings do better if I use a sprayer designed specifically for watering seedlings, which makes a very fine mist. Before I invested in one, I knocked down at least as many seedlings as managed to survive, in my clumsy efforts to water. When the plants are big enough, I switch to one of those watering wands, which allows me to apply enough water that they don’t dry out before it’s time to water them again.

Once you’ve started planting, keep a close eye on your garden. Make sure to check it at least once a day, and until everything really gets going, twice is better. That way, you can make sure everything is getting adequate water, and can catch any pest problems early.

With a little planning, a bit of effort and some water, you’ll be able to grow food in your own backyard all summer!

Green Tips for a Green Planet: Thinking Green is an Act of Peace

By TINA ARNOPOLE DRISKILL

“Because we don’t think about future generations, they will never forget us.”

– Henrik Tikkanen.

“If I am not for myself, then who will be for me? And if I am only for myself, then what am I? And if not now, when?”

– Rabbi Hillel, one of the most influential scholars in Jewish history.

Go-Green (<http://www.go-green.com>) puts global perspective on Rabbi Hillel’s words by pointing out, “Thinking green means being aware of our interconnectedness with the world and reflecting on the unintended damage we cause nature in the daily course of our lives. Thinking green leads to acting green - taking corrective action to make environmental responsibility a reality.

Robert Redford, at the 1985 Yosemite National Park dedication, emphasizes our green thinking responsibilities:

“I think the environment should be put in the category of our national security. Defense of our resources is just as important as defense abroad. Otherwise what is there to defend? The message is simple: “Every person is the right person to act. Every moment is the right moment to begin.”

THE Time to Act is Now!”

The importance of thinking green must take precedence if we are to have true peace with our world. Thinking Green is An Act of Peace!

Reduce. Reuse. Recycle. Commonly used, these words, like other green activism, are initiated by green thinking. The message is simple: a green attitude precedes green action. Give yourself credit for all you already do and spread the example in your corner of the world.

Div. I Peace Essay Winner

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America in this time of economic distress.

The US can be a powerful figurehead in ending oil conflicts and dismantling the oil trusts which are choking our world. According to the United Nations, China currently accounts for “almost one-fifth of total global investment, spending \$52 billion on renewable energy last year” with the US at \$51 billion in investments due to “government incentive programs.”⁶ China plans to “spend \$473.1 billion on clean energy investments over the next five years” and have 20% of its energy sourced by renewable energy in the year 2020.⁷ America can lead this renewable energy charge in the next four years and greatly profit from a detailed and forward thinking alternative energy plan. America needs to make an energy plan that could bring us to the lead on energy policies and an example for the world.

Solution: As outlined above, America needs to break free from its dependency on foreign oil that continuously hurts our economy and sparks war on a global scale. Alternative, American-based energy sources will generate new jobs and can put America at the top of the clean energy movement. America needs a comprehensive energy plan to move away from fossil fuels and directs our efforts at American based energy. As President, you can propose new legislation that force changes in energy regulations and stimulates the growth of new and clean energies with less emission. The federal government needs to support new energy by funding

innovative energy research. You can provide tax incentives for alternative energy businesses like new automotive technologies and energy suppliers. With this forward momentum toward a clean energy alternative, America will lead the way to a more peaceful world released from oil’s death grip.

Sincerely,

A Concerned Student

1. Roubini, Nouriel “Spiking Oil Prices Could Cripple Economic Recovery,” The Star, 19 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.thestar.com/opinion/editorialopinion/article/1148832--spiking-oil-prices-could-cripple-economic-recovery>>.

2. Michael L. Ross. “Oil Wealth Fuels Conflict Within Oil-Producing Countries.” Current Controversies: Oil. Ed. Debra A. Miller. Detroit: Greenhaven Press, 2010. Opposing Viewpoints Resource Center. Gale. SCELC California Lutheran University. 8 Oct. 2012.

3. Ibid.

4. T. Boone Pickens, “Let’s Transform Energy - With Natural Gas,” Ted Talks. Mar 2012. <http://www.ted.com/talks/t_boone_pickens_let_s_transform_energy_with_natural_gas.html>.

5. Employment: Study Point to Major Job Boost from Renewable Energy Development. (June 11, 2009). European Social Policy, 251581. 08 Oct. 2012, from Global Issues In Context .

6. Perkowski, Jack, “China Leads the World In Renewable Energy Investment,” Forbes. 27 Jul 2012.

<<http://www.forbes.com/sites/jackperkowski/2012/07/27/china-leads-the-world-in-renewable-energy-investment/>>.

7. Ibid.

Congress: End Endless War and Stop Becoming “the Evil That We Deplore”

By NORMAN SOLOMON

Congress waited six years to repeal the Tonkin Gulf Resolution after it opened the bloody floodgates for the Vietnam War in August 1964.

If that seems slow, consider the continuing failure of Congress to repeal the “war on terror” resolution—the Authorization for Use of Military Force—that sailed through, with just one dissenting vote, three days after 9/11.9 See <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-107publ40>).

Prior to casting the only “no” vote, Congresswoman Barbara Lee spoke on the House floor. “As we act,” she said, “let us not become the evil that we deplore.”

We have. That’s why, more than 11 years later, Lee’s prophetic one-minute speech is so painful to watch (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nf1N-y9Mbo4>). The “war on terror” has inflicted carnage in Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen and elsewhere as a matter of routine. Targets change, but the assumed prerogative to kill with impunity remains.

Now, Rep. Lee has introduced H.R. 198, a measure to repeal the Authorization for Use of Military Force. (This week, several thousand people have already used a RootsAction.org special webpage to email their Senators and House members about repealing that “authorization” for endless war. See http://act.rootsaction.org/p/dia/action/public/?action_KEY=7348). Opposed to repeal, the Obama administration is pleased to keep claiming that the 137-month-old resolution justifies everything from on-the-ground troops in combat to drone strikes and kill lists to flagrant abrogation of civil liberties.

A steep uphill incline faces efforts to repeal the resolution

that issued a blank political check for war in the early fall of 2001. Struggling to revoke it is a valuable undertaking. Yet even repeal would be unlikely to end the “war on terror.”

At the start of 1971, President Nixon felt compelled to sign a bill that included repeal of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. By then, he had shifted his ostensible authority for continuing the war on Vietnam—asserting his prerogative as commander in chief. Leaders of the warfare state never lack for rationales when they want to keep making war.

Beyond the worthy goal of repealing the Authorization for Use of Military Force is a need for Congress to cut off appropriations for the “war on terror.” A prerequisite: repudiating the lethal mythology of righteous war unbounded by national borders or conceivable duration.

In retrospect, the U.S. “war on terror” has turned out to be even more tenacious than the U.S. war that took several million lives in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia during the 1960s and early 1970s.

Some key similarities resonate with current circumstances. Year after year, in Congress, support for the Vietnam War was bipartisan. Presidents Johnson and Nixon preached against unauthorized violence in America’s cities while inflicting massive violence in Southeast Asia. Both presidents were

fond of proclaiming fervent wishes for peace.

But unlike the horrific war in Southeast Asia, the ongoing and open-ended “war on terror” is not confined by geography or, apparently, by calendar. The search for enemies to smite (and create) is availing itself of a bottomless pit, while bottom-feeding military contractors keep making a killing.

Beyond the worthy goal of repealing the Authorization for Use of Military Force is a need for Congress to cut off appropriations for the “war on terror.” A prerequisite: repudiating the lethal mythology of righteous war unbounded by national borders or conceivable duration.

What may be even more difficult to rescind is the chronic disconnect between lofty oratory and policies digging the country deeper into endless war.

“We, the people, still believe that enduring security and lasting peace do not require perpetual war,” President Obama said in his 2013 inaugural address, after four years of doing more than any other president in U.S. history to normalize perpetual war as a bipartisan enterprise.

Repealing the Authorization for Use of Military Force will be very hard. Revoking the power to combine lovely rhetoric with pernicious militarism will be even more difficult.

Norman Solomon is co-founder of www.RootsAction.org and founding director of the Institute for Public Accuracy. His books include *War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death and Made Love, Got War: Close Encounters with America’s Warfare State*.

Source URL: <http://www.commondreams.org/view/2013/02/20>

Pope Benedict on Social Justice

Submitted by KEN SCHROEDER

As Pope Benedict XVI has announced his resignation effective February 28, 2013, let’s look at some of his statements promoting rights and justice. While we see in the Catholic Church today the marginalization of women and gays, and the sex abuse scandal, we also see these powerful declarations for justice. Such words are rarely heard from our political leaders. The vision behind these words is a clear call for action.

Economy

“It is alarming to see hotbeds of tension and conflict caused by growing instances of inequality between rich and poor, by the prevalence of a selfish and individualistic mindset which also finds expression in an unregulated financial capitalism.”

“The predominant model of recent decades called for seeking maximum profit and consumption, on the basis of an individualistic and selfish mindset, aimed at considering individuals solely in terms of their ability to meet the demands of competitiveness... (I)n economic activity, peacemakers are those who establish bonds of fairness and reciprocity with their colleagues, workers, clients and consumers. They engage in economic activity for the sake of the common good and they experience this commitment as something transcending their self-interest, for the benefit of present and future generations.”

- New Year’s Message, January 1, 2013

“Profit is useful if it serves as a means toward an end. Once profit becomes the exclusive goal, if it is produced by improper means and without the common good as its ultimate end, it risks destroying wealth and creating poverty.”

- Caritas in Veritate, 2009 encyclical

Workers’ Rights

“One of the social rights and duties most under threat today is the right to work. The reason for this is that labour and the rightful recognition of workers’ juridical status are increasingly undervalued, since economic development is thought to depend principally on completely free markets...I would reaffirm that human dignity and economic, social and political factors, demand that we continue ‘to prioritize the goal of access to steady employment for everyone.’”

- New Year’s Message, January 1, 2013

“Through the combination of social and economic change, trade union organizations experience greater difficulty in carrying out their task of representing the interests of workers, partly because Governments, for reasons of economic utility, often limit the freedom or the negotiating capacity of labour unions. Hence traditional networks of solidarity have more and more obstacles to overcome. The repeated calls issued within the Church’s social doctrine... for the promotion of workers’ associations that can defend their rights must therefore be honoured today even more than in the past.”

- Caritas in Veritate, 2009 encyclical

Immigration

“We are all witnesses of the burden of suffering, the dislocation and the aspirations that accompany the flow of migrants. The phenomenon, as everyone knows, is difficult to manage; but there is no doubt that foreign workers, despite any difficulties concerning integration, make a significant contribution to the economic development of the host

country through their labour, besides that which they make to their country of origin through the money they send home. Obviously, these labourers cannot be considered as a commodity or a mere workforce. They must not, therefore, be treated like any other factor of production. Every migrant is a human person who, as such, possesses fundamental, inalienable rights that must be respected by everyone and in every circumstance.”

- Caritas in Veritate, 2009 encyclical

Environment

“Preservation of the environment, promotion of sustainable development and particular attention to climate change are matters of grave concern for the entire human family.”

- Letter to the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople on the Occasion of the Seventh Symposium of the Religion, Science and the Environment Movement, September 1, 2007

Speaking Out is at the Heart of Being a Citizen

By **GEORGE LAKOFF**, Reader Supported News

Political journalists have a job to do - to examine the SOTU's long list of proposals. They are doing that job, many are doing it well, and I'll leave it to them. Instead, I want to discuss what in the long run is a deeper question: How did the SOTU help to change public discourse? What is the change? And technically, how did it work?

The address was coherent. There was a single frame that fit together all the different ideas, from economics to the environment to education to gun safety to voting rights. The big change in public discourse was the establishment of that underlying frame, a frame that will, over the long haul, accommodate many more specific proposals.

Briefly, the speech worked via frame evocation. Not statement, evocation - the unconscious and automatic activation in the brains of listeners of a morally-based progressive frame that made sense of what the president said.

When a frame is repeatedly activated, it is strengthened. Obama's progressive frame was strengthened not only in die-hard progressives, but also in partial progressives, those who are progressive on some issues and conservative on others - the so-called moderates, swing voters, independents, and centrists. As a result, 77 percent of listeners approved of the speech, 53 percent strongly positive and 24 percent somewhat positive, with only 22 percent negative. When that deep progressive frame is understood and accepted by a 77 percent margin, the president has begun to move America toward a progressive moral vision.

If progressives are going to maintain and build on the president's change in public discourse so far, we need to understand just what that change has been and how he accomplished it.

It hasn't happened all at once.

In 2008, candidate Obama made overt statements. He spoke overtly about empathy and the responsibility to act on it as the basis of democracy. He spoke about the need for an "ethic of excellence." He spoke about the role of government to protect and empower everyone equally.

After using the word "empathy" in the Sotomayor nomination, he dropped it when conservatives confused it with sympathy and unfairness. But the idea didn't disappear.

By the 2013 Inaugural Address, he directly quoted the Declaration and Lincoln, overtly linking patriotism and the essence of democracy to empathy, to Americans caring for one another and taking responsibility for one another as well as themselves. He spoke overtly about how private success depends on public provisions. He carried out these themes with examples. And he had pretty much stopped making the mistake of using conservative language, even to negate it.

The change in public discourse became palpable.

The 2013 SOTU followed this evolution a crucial step further. Instead of stating the frames overly, he took them for granted and the nation understood. Public discourse had shifted; brains had changed. So much so that John Boehner looked shamed as he slumped, sulking in his chair, as if trying to disappear. Changed so much that Marco Rubio's response was stale and defensive: the old language wasn't working and Rubio kept talking in rising tones indicating uncertainty.

Here is how Obama got to 77 percent approval as an unapologetic progressive.

The president set his theme powerfully in the first few sentences - in about 30 seconds.

Fifty-one years ago, John F. Kennedy declared to this Chamber that 'the Constitution makes us not rivals for power but partners for progress ... It is my task,' he said, 'to report the State of the Union - to improve it is the task of us all.' Tonight, thanks to the grit and determination of the American people, there is much progress to report. ...

First, Obama recalled Kennedy - a strong, unapologetic liberal. "Partners" evokes working together, an implicit attack on conservative stonewalling, while "for progress" makes clear his progressive direction. "To improve it is the task of us all" evokes the progressive theme that we're all in this together with the goal of improving the common good. "The grit and determination of the American people" again says we work together, while incorporating the "grit and determination" stereotype of Americans pulling themselves up by their bootstraps - overcoming a "grinding war" and "grueling recession." He specifically and wisely did not pin the war and recession on the Bush era Republicans, as he reasonably could have. That would have divided Democrats from Republicans. Instead, he treated war and recession as if they were forces of nature that all Americans joined together to overcome. Then he moved on seamlessly to the "millions of Americans whose hard work and dedication have not yet been rewarded," which makes rewarding that work and determination "the task of us all."

This turn in discourse started working last year. Empathy and social responsibility as central American values reappeared in spades in the 2012 campaign right after Mitt Romney made his 47 percent gaff, that

47 percent of Americans were not succeeding because they were not talking personal responsibility for their lives. This allowed Obama to reframe people out of work, sick, injured, or retired as hard working and responsible and very much part of the American ideal, evoking empathy for them from most other Americans. It allowed him to meld the hard working and struggling Americans with the hard working and just getting by Americans into a progressive stereotype of hard working Americans in general who need help to overcome

external forces holding them back. It is a patriotic stereotype that joins economic opportunity with equality, freedom and civil rights: "if you work hard and meet your responsibilities, you can get ahead, no matter where you come from, what you look like, or who you love."

It is an all-American vision:

It is our unfinished task to make sure that this government works on behalf of the many, and not just the few; that it encourages free enterprise, rewards individual initiative, and opens the doors of opportunity to every child across this great nation.

"Our unfinished task" refers to citizens - us - as ruling the government, not the reverse. "We" are making the government do what is right. To work "on behalf of the many, and not just the few." And he takes from the progressive vision the heart of the conservative message. "We" require the government to encourage free enterprise, reward individual initiative, and provide opportunity for all. It is the reverse of the conservative view of the government ruling us. In a progressive democracy, the government is the instrument of the people, not the reverse.

In barely a minute, he provided a patriotic American progressive vision that seamlessly adapts the heart of the conservative message. Within this framework comes the list of policies, each presented with empathy for ideal Americans. In each case, we, the citizens who care about our fellow citizens, must make our imperfect government do the best it can for fellow Americans who do meet, or can with help meet, the American ideal.

With this setting of the frame, each item on the list of policies fits right in. We, the citizens, use the government to protect us and maximally enable us all to make use of individual initiative and free enterprise.

The fact that the policy list was both understood and approved of by 77 percent of those watching means that one-third of those who did not vote for the president have assimilated his American progressive moral vision.

The president's list of economic policies was criticized by some as a lull - a dull, low energy section of the speech. But the list had a vital communicative function beyond the policies themselves. Each item on the list evoked, and thereby strengthened in the brains of most listeners, the all-American progressive vision of the first section of the speech. Besides, if you're going to build to a smash finish, you have to build from a lull.

And it was a smash finish! Highlighting his gun safety legislation by introducing one after another of the people whose lives were shattered by well-reported gun violence. With each introduction came the reframe "They deserve a vote" over and over and over. He was chiding the Republicans not just for being against the gun safety legislation, but for being unwilling to even state their opposition in public, which a vote would require. The president is all too aware that, even in Republican districts, there is great support for gun safety

There was a single frame that fit together all the different ideas, from economics to the environment to education to gun safety to voting rights.

reform, support that threatens conservative representatives. “They deserve a vote” is a call for moral accounting from conservative legislators. It is a call for empathy for the victims in a political form, a form that would reveal the heartlessness, the lack of Republican empathy for the victims. “They deserve a vote” shamed the Republicans in the House. As victim after victim stood up while the Republicans sat slumped and close-mouthed in their seats, shame fell on the Republicans.

And then it got worse for Republicans. Saving the most important for last - voting reform - President Obama introduced Desiline Victor, a 102-year spunky African American Florida woman who was told she would have to wait six hours to vote. She hung in there, exhausted but not defeated, for many hours and eventually voted. The room burst into raucous applause, putting to shame the Republicans who are adopting practices and passing laws to discourage voting by minority groups.

And with the applause still ringing, he introduced police officer Brian Murphy who held off armed attackers at the Sikh Temple in Minneapolis, taking twelve bullets and lying in a puddle of his blood while still protecting the Sikhs. When asked how he did it, he replied, “That’s just how we’re made.”

That gave the president a finale to end where he began.

We may do different jobs, and wear different uniforms, and hold different views than the person beside us. But as Americans, we all share the same proud title: We are citizens. It’s a word that doesn’t just describe our nationality or legal status. It describes the way we’re made. It describes what we believe. It captures the enduring idea that this country only

works when we accept certain obligations to one another and to future generations; that our rights are wrapped up in the rights of others; and that well into our third century as a nation, it remains the task of us all, as citizens of these United States, to be the authors of the next great chapter in our American story.

It was a finale that gave the lie to the conservative story of America, that democracy is an individual matter, that it gives each of us the liberty to seek his own interests and well-being without being responsible for anyone else or anyone else being responsible for him, from which it follows that the government should not be in the job of helping its citizens. Marco Rubio came right after and tried out this conservative anthem that has been so dominant since the Reagan years. It fell flat.

President Obama, in this speech, created what cognitive scientists call a “prototype” - an ideal American defined by a contemporary progressive vision that incorporates a progressive market with individual opportunity and initiative. It envisions an ideal citizenry that is in charge of the government, forcing the president and the Congress to do the right thing.

That is how the president has changed public discourse. He has changed it at the level that counts, the deepest level,

the moral level. What can make that change persist? What will allow such an ideal citizenry to come into existence?

The president can’t do it. Congress can’t do it. Only we can as citizens, by adopting the president’s vision, thinking in his moral frames, and speaking out from that vision whenever possible. Speaking out is at the heart of being a citizen,

Speaking out is at the heart of being a citizen, speaking out is political action, and only if an overwhelming number of us speak out, and live out, this American vision, will the president and the Congress be forced to do what is best for all.

speaking out is political action, and only if an overwhelming number of us speak out, and live out, this American vision, will the president and the Congress be forced to do what is best for all.

By all means, discuss the policies. Praise them when you like them, criticize them when they fall short. Don’t hold back. Talk in public. Write to others. But be sure to make clear the basic principles behind the policies.

And don’t use the language of the other side, even to negate it. Remember that if you say “Don’t Think of an Elephant,” people will think of an elephant.

Structure is important. Start with the general principles, move to policy details, finish with the general principles.

From Reader Supported News, [http://readersupportednews.org/opinion2/277-](http://readersupportednews.org/opinion2/277-75/16058-speaking-out-is-at-the-heart-of-being-a-citizen-)

[75/16058-speaking-out-is-at-the-heart-of-being-a-citizen-](http://readersupportednews.org/opinion2/277-75/16058-speaking-out-is-at-the-heart-of-being-a-citizen-)

It's the Guns

from page 1

desperately truly need mental health services from seeking the help they need out of fear their behavior could be misinterpreted and they could find themselves targets of the state? Could this further isolate those who most need help? Don’t forget that, according to the Times, while people with diagnosable mental illness are responsible for close to 20 percent of rampage or serial killings, they only account for four percent of violent crimes overall. Dr. Michael Stone, a New York Forensic psychiatrist, told the Times that most mass murders are committed “by working-class men who’ve been jilted, fired, or otherwise humiliated.” There is no illness to diagnosed amongst the greatest perpetrators of these heinous acts. Additionally, people with mental illness are more likely to be the victims of violent crime than the perpetrator, and those who are suicidal have a much higher success rate when a gun is involved.

But we aren’t concerned with protecting people from themselves. We want to protect us from them.

That’s why background checks for gun purchases have so much popular support, even across ideological lines. We want to identify the people who might do harm before they have a chance and deny them access to guns. Basically, keep the guns out of the hands of bad guys. But what constitutes a bad guy? How do we know?

Because if you were to ask Sikhs in Oak Creek, Wisconsin,

they might say the bad guys are Army veterans with ties to white supremacist groups. If she were still alive, you could ask 22-year-old Rekia Boyd in Chicago, killed by a gunshot to the head while hanging out with her friends, she may have told you it’s off-duty police officers. In Jacksonville, Florida, 17-year-old Jordan Davis might have said that it’s 46-year-old white men and self-described “responsible gun owners” that are the real bad guys. His killer was a previously law-abiding citizen. Seven year-old Aiyana Jones in Detroit might have an altogether different opinion, telling you the bad guys are the SWAT teams on a reality TV show. She was shot while a paramilitary unit, followed by an A&E production crew filming an episode of “The First 48,” stormed her house. It’s all about perspective.

What we’re attempting to enact at this point are a number of measures aimed at preventing mass killings. It’s a laudable goal, and maybe it’s all we can do for the moment. However, those dying in the streets in Chicago, Detroit, New York, Philadelphia, and Oakland, those being murdered by abusive husbands, or even people accidentally shooting themselves aren’t suffering because we don’t have an assault weapons ban. It’s the guns, period.

We must pass some legislation aimed at reducing gun violence because we can’t afford to do nothing. Even as we become a less violent society overall, gun deaths are an epi-

demic. But what’s on the table isn’t going to end gun violence, though it may placate some of our fears. What we have to face is, entrenched in our culture, is an idea that intimately links guns with freedom. More than self-defense, gun-rights activists invoke the Second Amendment, defending the right to have guns because we have the constitutional right to have guns. It’s a part of our American identity. We have developed a mythology around guns where they have meant freedom for everyone from the founding fathers to Black Power activists. If we’re serious about ending gun violence, we have to ask: what role do guns play in our society, and what role should they play? People keep dying in numbers that astound; yet we are still here trying to prevent a certain type of death from happening from a certain type of person. That isn’t liberty. Are we prepared to actually fight for it?

It’s a big question. But so long as we ignore it in favor of the simplistic binary of good guys vs. bad guys, we will be a nation in mourning, asking ourselves time and time again, “How do we put an end to gun violence?” The wrong question will always lead us to the wrong answer. Maybe it’s time we start asking ourselves if we can imagine a society where we don’t need guns at all.

Mychal Denzel Smith is a freelance writer and social commentator. His work on race, politics, social justice, pop. <http://www.thenation.com/article/172267/its-not-bad-guys-its-guns>

The Age of Light

A messenger is called to remove the darkness from your eyes
A mighty nation will arise
Awake from your sleep America
Receive the message of the messenger as meat

The savior of the nation must be sweet
Unity is the contact we must seek
Rise up in love so others might see
Stand up America, Truth is the key
Let us love one another
We have a covenant to keep

Come in scattered nations gather together openly
You are your brother's keeper
Humanity is one people
Make a choice America, take the lead
Age of light bring about peace
Light the way that we may see
Humanity as one universally

A Summons of Souls

Rouse yourself O language of unity and communicate words,
color, the meaning of things being true or untrue, real or unreal, seen or unseen
Therefore I call forth a language that has the power to tap the pulses of sisters and brothers all around the world intervening upon genocide and death
I summons the spirits of unity and organization in a language of active entirety thus shaking the foundations of the earth loosing
souls displaying peace and harmony all over the globe

The Games of Strategy

The games of strategies are always at hand
Strategies invented by man
In the scramble for supremacy in the land
Left out is the one who did and does not know the plan

Wills of Choice inspired ideas in the minds of Men
the knowledge of good and evil stretched forth its hand
With events unfolding as planned survival entered the minds of ordinary men
The game strategies are now at hand
The bureaucrat seeks dominion over the land taking all that he can



A Community Advocate for Modesto's West Side

By DORIS COLEMAN

My dedication and commitment to the rehabilitation of my race and a united America started at a very young age. I came from a small rural community in East Texas called New Hope. I was groomed at home, church, and school to be of service to the community, to actively respect self, others, and the environment.

During my Jr. High and High School years in the 60's, I became totally active planting Texas Pines in communities where trees had been destroyed by fire. As a young adult I became committed to educating myself and other women about women's rights and choices, which were hidden everywhere then. My spirit of activism was alive and well. I thought I would go into the clergy, but marriage and children took me away from this pursuit. Family didn't take from my "I can do" spirit of activism.

I was divorced after seven years of marriage, and left Texas to be with family in California. My children and I made a new start as residents of Modesto's West Side. Soon after settling in, I was recognized as someone who could be trusted to give personal motivation, encouragement, and knowledge to a variety of social agencies and private councils. This was a time when Modesto's West Side still had neighborhoods instead of hoods.

The late Bishop Monroe Taylor Sr., director of the King-Kennedy Center, and I peacefully joined with the late Howard Clark, a Housing Authority board member and pastor of the Second Baptist Church, and youth teachers like Carlton and Betty Wright, and James Anderson, pastor of Christian Love Baptist Church. A host of community leaders stood united for the sake of the community.

Today, I am still very passionate about my environment and a united and peaceful people of the world. I choose to give back personally through one-on-one counseling, angel oracle card readings, writings, and poetry.

Call to a Nation

Let's come together as we are called
Now is the time that we are to be in full service to our earthly calling
Prophecies are being fulfilled, the plan has been rolling right along as our names are called whether we are aware or not

It is time to reach toward consciousness; we are heirs of a continuum
Let's hold on, no matter how rough the storm, we must carry on what other generations have began
We must run the mileage through the storm
We will give the absolute the glory
We will not tarry or turn back

We will sing a happy song for we are together
No one is alone when we work together the work don't take long
All is one is our theme song
Victory is ours as the continuum moves along and we go rolling along
Help! Sing the song as you are added on
Each new generation sings this song moving toward consciousness in the continuum

America the Beautiful

Beloved America, where have you gone?
Your masses have fallen from grace, your throne
They have no faith in their own
Pestilence and disease are raging strong
The young are defiled with no concept of self or own
The role models and leaders sing greed songs
In God we trust was the slogan of our homes
Today the slogan is the root of our wrong
America the beautiful, where have you gone?

Out of Occupy comes the “Book Group”

By MICHAEL Ž. JURKOVI

With the flurry of activity and activism brought by Occupy Wall Street in September 2011, Occupy came to Modesto. In fact, Occupy Modesto is still here and meets regularly, every Friday afternoon, from 4-6 p.m. but that will change as the days continue to get longer. However, with Occupy as with any social movement, there have been hiccups; the path toward progress never has been and never will be linear. One of the biggest issues faced by the larger Occupy Movement, and particularly in a community such as Modesto that is defined by its urban sprawl, is educating and discussing how did we get here. Yes, everyone knows we are “mad as hell” but what are we mad about? How can we live the 60s ethos to think globally and act locally to improve Modesto?

Enter the Book Group. The Book Group is a quasi-offshoot of Occupy Modesto with elements of the Peace/Life Center and College Avenue UCC thrown in, but we are always open and welcome to others. At this time, there is no official name or witty slogan to unify the group. Like Occupy itself, we are a hodgepodge of various elements with common themes. Our goal is to understand enough about the US economic meltdown, its effects, and how to spread the message to encourage activism. We want change and part of that change is tearing down barriers and providing education and lively discussion about the current state of affairs. Our goal is, however, that not only will we be armed with facts to share in the community but that we can also pose practical solutions. Thus, the emphasis is to select books which not only educate, but provide possible avenues and practical suggestions.

The Group began in June 2012 and meets the first and third Thursdays of each month at 3:30 p.m. in the College Avenue UCC Youth Building. The book group has been a bit of a mystery, but the hope of this article and our faithful members is that we can grow in effectiveness and understanding. Even if we can't actually change Wall Street, we can certainly make waves in Modesto and the larger community. In February, we read *The Great American Stickup* by Robert Scheer.

Briefly, Robert Scheer's *The Great American Stickup* chronicles US policies from Reagan and beyond and changes in economic philosophy became enshrined in policy and how that policy lead to the economic meltdown of the first decade of this century. Of course, though the story begins

with Reagan, Scheer uses his insight and skills as a veteran journalist to show that it was not a partisan affair. *The Great American Stickup* details how complicit Clinton and his cronies were in perpetuating bad policy. Scheer also recounts the tragic story of Brooksley Born, a courageous woman who spoke out against those policies and was cast aside. Fortunately for Born and unfortunately for us, the economic catastrophe vindicated her and showed how Americans suffered at the hands of political greed.

Scheer's book is a panoramic sweep that covers many elements of where we are today; however, as the current financial crisis is so large and complex, book choices are an important decision. In the past, there has been some rancor and disapproval of some texts. What part of the economy should this group discuss? Regardless, the chosen material is generally meaningful to someone (if only the person who selected it!). The books have included titles such as *Death of the Liberal Class* by Christopher Hedges; *The Rich and the Rest of Us: A Poverty Manifesto* by Tavis Smiley and Cornel West; *The Little Blue Book* by George Lakoff; *Occupy* by Noam Chomsky.

All ideas are welcome and we are open to book suggestions. The only guideline is that the book be affordable and readily available in paperback. We currently have one member who orders books in bulk for the group with some members opting for e-book options. Some people show up without having read the book but still offer wit, wisdom, and insight on the particular ideas covered in the book. It would also be beneficial if the person who has chosen the book be willing to lead discussion on it or offer insight as to why the book is of value and how it will help us understand how we

can be proactive in affecting social change.

Thanks to Sandy Sample for providing much of the information used for this article. Thanks to College Avenue for allowing us to use their facilities. Thanks to the Modesto Peace/Life Center and Occupy Modesto for planting the seed.

Our March selection will be *Agenda for a New Economy* (2010) by David Korten. If you have further questions, comments, concerns, complaints, words of praise, email me at: mzjurkovic@gmail.com

March meetings: Thursdays; 7th and 21st at 3:30 College Ave UCC Youth Building, Corner of Orangeburg and College.



Searching for common ground.

Julia B Mensinger © March 2013

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Call and Response: What the President Did This Week

By JIM WALLIS

There is a tradition in the black church named “call and response.” It’s simply the experience of the preacher “calling” and the congregation “responding.” I’ve always loved it. When you’re preaching in a black church, and the congregants begin to actively and vocally respond, your sermon can actually get better, stronger, deeper, and more powerful than it might have been if everyone just sat there. Sermons get interactive. Congregations can be inspired by the preacher — and the other way around. Ideas grow, get taken further, and even develop during and after the sermon. And it can make things change.

After his first year in office, I sent a letter to President Barack Obama humbly suggesting he needed “the political equivalent of the black church’s call and response.” Just talking to and in Washington was never going to get important things done. Washington just sits there and mostly makes sure that things don’t change — and that the special interests that buy, shape, and control this city usually have their way. (That private letter to the president will be published for the first time in my new book about the common good coming out in April.)

I recalled something Obama said right after the 2008 election — that he would need “the wind of a movement at my back” to get anything really important done. He would have to go over the heads of Washington, to speak directly to the people that had elected him and also those who didn’t. He would have to have public debates about the common good and not just debate in Washington.

I saw him do that in this week’s State of the Union speech. Barack Obama was speaking over the heads of the senators and members of the House — who were just sitting there, standing up only in partisan moments — right to the 33 million people who were watching. He was making his case to the American people, appealing to public opinion on behalf of things he wants to do — instead of just reaching out to Washington, as many pundits said he ought to do.

In Washington, the Congressional debate is about debt, deficits, spending, and taxes, and almost nothing else. Many Americans, including many of us in the faith community, agree that massive debts are a moral issue and not something we want to leave for our children. But most Americans also believe that how you deal with deficits is a moral issue. And they don’t believe, as the deficit cutters in Washington often say, “with trillions and trillions of dollars in debt, it is time to” cut most of the programs that help poor and vulnerable people. That is what the budget proposals of the deficit hawks would do, even if they don’t admit it. We believe that is immoral, especially when the same people still defend grossly unfair tax loopholes and benefits for the wealthiest and best connected. They oppose more revenue from wealthiest — those special interests who have bought Washington — and never show the courage to take on the government’s worst waste, fraud, and abuse in the Pentagon’s massive spending. What Washington never really admits is how it helps those at the top of the economic order much more than those at the bottom.

Let’s start that conversation.

The president also said what most Americans know is true — that rising healthcare costs and retiring baby boomer needs will require serious reforms of our healthcare system and crucial programs like Medicare. There are special interests in Washington that don’t ever want to admit that or accept the changes we will need while still protecting seniors in need.

What most Americans think makes sense is a balanced approach between increased revenues and careful spending cuts. Most Americans think that the political brinkmanship of moving “from one manufactured crisis to the next” is not the way to find a responsible and balanced path to fiscal sustainability — that deficit reduction alone is not a plan for economic growth.

President Obama also spoke the “p” words that people in Washington almost never want to talk about — “poverty” and “poor” people and children. With more people in poverty than any time in the last 50 years and economic inequality at record high levels, it is time to talk about it. It’s time for the president to say that no one who works full time in the wealthiest nation on earth should have to live in poverty; they ought to have a living wage. Most Americans believe that.

They also believe, as virtually all our educators do, that quality preschool should be available to every child in America if we want stable and successful families.

What especially resonated with many people in the president’s speech is that our “North Star” should be creating more good-paying jobs in America, and helping to educate and train people for them.

The president said what most Americans believe — that we should not reduce the deficit by cutting crucial investments in education, infrastructure, science, medical health, clean energy, or programs for the most vulnerable — while enabling the richest to become even wealthier than they have been in years. And whoever is willing to protect the poor and vulnerable in our fiscal debates and commit to overcome poverty with new opportunities will find the faith community at their back, at their front, and on both their sides.

Most Americans now believe that the time has come to pass comprehensive immigration reform that includes a responsible path to earned citizenship for the millions of undocumented immigrants who have lived and worked here responsibly for decades. The faith community, in particular, has come to believe this is a moral and biblical issue — it is to “welcome the stranger” among us. Because of the outside pressure of the faith community, the law-enforcement community, and the business community, even Washington is finally coming to admit that our broken immigration system needs to be fixed. The standing ovation when the president called for it was the biggest moment of bipartisanship exhibited Tuesday night.

Outside pressure is the only way to change Washington’s decisions, whether is it the historic need to deal with climate change, or change our nation’s failed war policies, or finally address the issue that became the most emotional moment of the president’s Tuesday night speech — America’s gun violence.

The president said the victims of gun violence “deserve a vote” on necessary and commonsense gun laws, and that the Washington politicians deserve accountability for their votes. Public opinion is clearly for such reforms, while those who have bought Congress are now preventing public opinion from dealing with our horrible national gun violence.

So it’s a good thing that the president is ready to issue “calls” to the American people, over the heads of the Washington politicians and pundits.

It’s time for our response.

Jim Wallis is the author of the forthcoming book, *On God’s Side: What Religion Forgets and Politics Hasn’t Learned about Serving the Common Good*, will appear in April. Follow Jim on Twitter @JimWallis.

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