Grass-Fed Is Best
Growing Vermont’s Farm Future
By Bruce Hennessey

Maple Wind Farm’s Bruce Hennessey herding sheep on a hilltop in Huntington. Maple Wind uses management-intensive grazing for its sheep, horses, Angus cattle, and fowl. PHOTO BY BETH HENNESSEY

For seven years, I didn’t eat meat, not because I didn’t like it or objected to the killing of animals for food, but because the negative health and environmental impacts seemed to argue in favor of leaving animal protein out of my diet entirely. In retrospect, it turns out I didn't have the whole story. Getting to the meat of the matter has been a life-changing journey – and our transition from a non-agrarian/vegetarian lifestyle to full-fledged grass farming came through unexpected circumstances.

Deciding to grass farm
Coming to care for a piece of land has a way of sharpening your focus. Several years ago, my wife Beth and I fell in love with the old dairy farm at the end of our road here in Huntington. Fallow for years, the pastures and hayfields sported poplar saplings and a healthy crop of goldenrod. The farm’s hilltop views, wildlife, and easy access to the Long and Catamount Trails first caught our attention. When it went up for sale amidst rumors of development, we made an offer. You might say it was an impulse buy.

Elected Independence
Where I Stand
By Frank Bryan

Enough.
It is time to get busy with the business of secession. We want to act. We need to act. It is time to act.
Let us heed the words of Robert Lewis Stevenson:

You cannot run away from a weakness
You must some time fight it out or perish
And if that be so, why not now?
And where you stand?

And where do we stand?
We stand in Vermont.
One of our greatest citizens, John Dewey, once said: “Democracy must begin at home and its home is the small community.”

So, too, I would argue, must secession begin at home. And America’s homeland is Vermont.
Beginning secession at home requires, of course, more courage and commitment and, most of all, more work.
It is easy to loathe George Bush and hate the war in Iraq and bemoan global warming and call for an end to the military-industrial complex.
It is easy to go see a movie like Michael Moore’s “Fahrenheit 9/11,” which is so full of intellectual cheap shots, gutless innuendo, half truths, and flat-out bullshit it will be treated in the cool light of history for what it was: an opportunity for well-heeled, self-indulgent intellectuals to engage in group masturbation of the mind – a circle jerk for principled but perspective-challenged liberals.
And the irony is this: dishonest hyperbole lets Mr. Bush off the hook.
So why don’t we act – on behalf of peaceable secession, and the re-creation of Vermont as an independent republic? The first, and primary, reason is fear.

As Ernest Hemingway, who knew a thing or two about courage, put it, we lack “the ability to suspend the imagination.”

In the face of insecurity, the human mind tends to imagine the worst and, as a result, we remain frozen, inert, paralyzed. Our insecurities surrounding secession, I
Editorial

Last night I awoke at around 3 a.m. and walked outside to listen to the coyotes and enjoy the strangely lemon-like moonlight air. I looked up. Right above me in the moonlit sky I saw a broad steady band of... something cloudlike, an undiminished vapor trail, stretching as far as I could see from east to west. It was not anything ordinary. It just sat there, a motionless ribbon I couldn’t fathom. After a time, I went back to bed.

In the morning I barely mentioned the event to my wife. There it was: something inexplicable, obviously human-caused, silent, at 3 a.m. unobtrusive, and therefore unremarked. Yes, if I dropped the whole of my pursuits and dove into this one, possibly anomalous, random mystery, tracking it relentlessly through the Internet, maybe I’d come up with something. But I don’t want to feed my conspiratorial inklings.

Clearly there are things beyond our control, even right over our heads. Until recently we haven’t controlled the weather, precisely because of effects of all our activity, as a species, worldwide, had been constrained by certain beliefs, values, technologies, myths, in short by culture, permitting us to remain within the framework once named Mother Earth, and now called Gaia Theory – the Earth as a self-regulating system.

Until recently we were so bounded. Asals, for the last two hundred years we have begun to affect the biosphere to such a degree, and with such unrestrained, culturally sanctioned wantonness, that it now appears we inadvertently “control” the climate. But that’s batsh**t, ludicrous hubris.... Or is it? Understanding the Earth’s climate system is a massive and largely unfinished scientific project. Even research scientists studying polar and glacial ice cores now find themselves in the throes of a scientific “paradigm shift,” as they begin to grasp that “abrupt climate change” of a catastrophic sort can and might occur, not in the immensity of geologic time, but in the minute space scale of one human generation (or less).

As we are launched on this fantastic, unintended journey into the depths of the future, driven by perhaps the strangest set of cultural imperatives ever devised by human imagination, what might the imperative “electing independence” mean? What’s to be done, what work chosen, what actions taken—if you and I are to choose independence? What does it mean, to be independent in a world where violence, vainglory, and greed are the most treasured trump cards played?

It is this “military-industrial complex” state, loosed from its moral moorings, we must “elect” to withdraw from: a colossus engaged in its Orwellian perpetual war... to shatter people and humiliate whole nations thousands of miles distant.

Electing isn’t about elections. These are bought and sold by a single party or interest: the global corporations (see Thomas Naylor’s essay, this issue). Look for a U.S. politician who champions states rights, small businesses, non-interference in other countries’ politics, independent media, a sovereign states militia (National Guard), the Bill of Rights (all of it), or the inviolability of habeas corpus—which Thomas Macaulay termed “the most stringent curb that ever legislation imposed on tyranny.” And, as you look, recall the USA PATRIOT Acts, Posse Comitatus, the Military Commissions Act, as well as the go-to-war rationale given by the president, and accepted by our “legislators,” namely, those infamous WMD. Look, but you will not find much or many among the Beltway politicians—for whom freedom no longer denotes the individual citizen, but only the collective, the nation. And especially, the nation at war.

It is precisely this thing, this “military-industrial complex” state loosed utterly from its moral moorings, we must “elect” to withdraw from: a colossus engaged in its Orwellian perpetual war, its war on terror, that same indiscriminate “terror” it itself employs to “shock and awe,” to master events, shatter people, and humiliate whole nations in a world thousands of miles distant from its native shores.

But here in Vermont, what shall we elect to be for? (It is never enough to choose against, at least for long.) Shall it not be to take a stand, a stand on the land where we live, and re-forge our beliefs, remake our values, including independence, in the pursuit of a revolutionary local economy, dependent on the myriad face-to-face relationships that make a local economy vital?

In his brilliant essay on the world and local economies (www.oriononline.org), Wendell Berry sketches the similarities between communism and ‘free-market’ capitalism, saying both are “modern versions of oligarchy.” He then describes what he calls a “total economy,” essentially the world economy “defended” by U.S. military might:

A total economy is one in which everything—“life forms,” for instance, or the “right to pollute”—is “private property” and has a price and is for sale. In a total economy, significant and sometime critical choices that once belonged to individuals or communities become the property of corporations....A total economy is an unrestrained taking of profits from the disintegration of nations, communities, households, landscapes, and ecosystems. It licenses symbolic or artificial wealth to “grow” by means of the destruction of the real wealth of the world.

This is as succinct and penetrating a summary of our situation as can be told.

Faced with the searching tentacles of this WTO-sanctioned and protected monster we are, as Berry reminds us, “in danger of losing [our] economic security and [our] freedom, both at once.”

To protect ourselves we have but one realistic recourse, one “vote” to cast on behalf of our own individual living independence: to join forces with our neighbors in the creation of a “local economy.” Berry points out that most such efforts across the country are beginning with the making of a local food economy. (In this issue, both Tod Murphy and Bruce Hennessey write about their roles in shaping a local food economy in Vermont.)

Yes, peculiar things are happening, things beyond our ken and control. No, we cannot, in the end, separate ourselves from the planetary fate we have helped set in motion—those vast biogeochemical cycles we have intruded upon so witlessly. What is left to us who treasure independence is to join forces with our neighbors and forge our own home-grown versions of homestead security, versions that taken together may one day form a patchwork quilt fit for a whole state – perhaps an independent Vermont republic – to celebrate, once again.

Ian Baldwin
Publisher

Contributors

Ian Baldwin is cofounder of Chelsea Green Publishing and is publisher of Vermont Commons.

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Franklin Sanders is a member of the Board of Directors of the League of the South.

Rob Williams is Vermont Commons (web)editor, and co-chair of the Second Vermont Republic.
Letters to the Editor

Importing Health Care Expertise

By most accounts, Vermont’s latest health care reform legislation (Catamount Health) puts Vermont in first place among U.S. states on the road toward an equitable, socially responsible and efficient health system. Yet, even if it is successful, Catamount Health will still represent only a step, and much of the journey toward cost-effective, universal, comprehensive, and preventive health care will still lie ahead. A great deal of arduous, contentious, and slow effort will still remain, separating Vermont from the norm in the other forty-odd advanced industrial nations.

Here’s a modest proposal for the Vermont General Assembly. Contact the five or six nations with the best health care systems in terms of both efficiency and results – e.g., Denmark, Switzerland, Sweden – and invite them to clone their system in, say, Windham County for testing purposes. Commercially, of course, but not for an additional $2,500 per inhabitant per year, which is how much extra the U.S. health care regime costs us because of its inefficiency.

Let them all pitch for the business, and select the winner. Forget about re-inventing it all here. Test the whole approach: health care financing, medical records systems, pharmaceuticals management, hospitals and clinics, preventive care, long-term care, wellness programs, the whole thing. Learn from the experience. Roll out an appropriately adapted version of it across the state. License unique software and other intellectual property from the foreign source. Import their technology. Get them to manufacture it in Vermont for the U.S. market. It’s got to be cheaper and faster and better than the approach we’re currently taking.

What’s in it for them? Why would the British National Health Service or the Swedish Ministry of Health and Social Affairs be interested in something like this? They are not private entrepreneurs.

No, they are not. The answer: export promotion. Their health care systems are supported by thousands of private vendors: medical technology companies, software firms, pharmaceuticals companies, consultants, hospital architects, service providers – many of them world leaders. Windham County is only one of 3,143 counties, parishes, and independent municipalities in the USA. Vermont has only 0.21 percent of the U.S. population. It could be the razor-thin end of the wedge, a first tiny stepping stone to a vastly larger market, as America comes around and realizes it could be spending 6 percent of its GDP in a far more productive fashion (i.e., not on health care), and getting a lot more for another 9 percent, and creating a more just, equitable society at the same time.

It could be fire against fire: a massive commercial interest in changing America’s health care system for the better, against a massive commercial interest in keeping it the same.

Think about it. Vermont’s people, local governments, and private sector could gain a lot by having it happen here first. Globalization can work FOR us, too.

Ralph Meima
Brattleboro

Vive La Difference


What was profoundly significant, at least to me, is that so many different secession-minded groups and regions and individuals have arrived at common ground from opposite directions. Conservative vs. liberal, Republican vs. Democrat; these old categories have been scrambled by the Middlebury Institute.

What was profoundly significant, at least to me, is that so many different secession-minded groups and regions and individuals have arrived at common ground from opposite directions. Conservative vs. liberal, Republican vs. Democrat; these old categories have been scrambled into meaninglessness by recent events – Bush and Co. in particular – and a new paradigm is emerging.

It was an exciting beyond measure to be a small part of its birth, even recognizing that some folks there want to secede from the red states, while others want to secede from the blue.

The new – or REnewed – paradigm is liberty: freedom from unlimited, unaccountable, despotic, state-corporate power, a phenomenon easily recognized even in its U.S.

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Wells, it happened. The Middlebury Institute pulled off the First North American Secessionist Convention in Burlington last November, and it was as successful as any first-time effort in this ticklish political territory could be.

More than 40 people attended the event, including journalists and camera crews, and, in an all-day roundtable discussion, portrayed the current strength of the secessionist movement, its strategies, its outreach, its potential. Delegates came from 16 secessionist organizations in 18 states, including Hawaii, Alaska, Cascadia (along the Cascades in the West), Louisiana, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, New York, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine.

Though all the presentations proved engaging, illuminating a community of colleagues who had not known each other before, the most striking thing about the event was – that it was held at all.

That people came from so many distant parts to join forces.

That people took the idea of secession seriously and were willing to get together with like-minded souls.

That people were willing to take time off to declare their belief in secession as a practical political activity for this day and age.

That we started a movement.

"Secession is every American’s birthright," is how Second Vermont Republic co-chair Rob Williams put it. "We have to make it a viable option, as it was in the first 70 years of the United States’ history. We need to make it contemporary and sophisticated and – and I don’t mind saying – sexy."

The politics of the delegates proved about as diverse as you could find in a single room. A good number were libertarians, like the New State Project people, who want to get 20,000 people to move to New Hampshire and then slowly take over the state government and make it a libertarian oasis. Several were primarily Christians, like the Christian Exodus people who have a similar scheme to take over South Carolina ("We’re a warm-weather knock-off of FSP," CE president Cory Burnell commented). Their goal? Working from county level to state, pass laws with a conservative religious ideology (against abortion and same-sex marriage, for school prayer and unregulated home schooling). Some were simply anarchist-minded activists from groups that want to reduce political power to a manageable state level, as with the Alaska Independence Party and Cascadia Now. And then there was the representative from Hawaii who wasn’t for secession so much as liberation, to return the islands to the rightful nation they were before United States gun ships and sugar planters conquered them in 1893.

A diverse lot, indeed, but as Ian Baldwin, Vermont Commons publisher, told the meeting: "It isn’t a left and right thing. The point is we are decentralists, all of us, and we’re up against a monster."

And that indeed was one of the three basic points upon which everyone in the room agreed: the empire that the United States has become is a monster. "Through oppression, greed, corruption, incompetence, and folly, the state is forfeiting its moral authority," said one statement from the Southern National Congress Committee. "The empire is rotten," said one delegate from Virginia, "and it can’t be fixed." "The American system cares nothing for people," said a representative of the League of the South. "It provides no security for anyone."

The second point of agreement was on the legitimacy of secession. As the convention put it, in issuing a "Burlington Declaration" at the end of the session: "Any political entity has the right to separate itself from a larger body of which it is a part and peaceably to establish its independence as a free and legitimate state in the eyes of the world." It took Donald Livingston, a professor of philosophy at Emory University and a scholar of secession for many years, to point out that this legitimacy rests on U.S. history itself. Not only were the Founding Fathers seeking secession instead of revolution – they had no interest in taking over Whitehall – but secession has been done, peacefully, several times in U.S. history, as with Kentucky’s secession from Virginia, Tennessee’s from North Carolina, and Maine’s from Massachusetts.

"This is a thoroughly American idea," Livingston said. "We’re not a bunch of fringe kooks."

And the third point of agreement, which emerged only as the discussion went on, was the understanding that secession in a sense is only a means toward the objective of liberty. As one delegate from Louisiana put it: "Secession is not the end, but the means to the end—liberty." After the day-long conversation, another delegate added: "A new paradigm is emerging and it was exciting beyond measure to be a small part of its birth. The new—or renewed—paradigm is liberty, freedom from unlimited, unaccountable, despotic, state-corporate power."

Ultimately, it didn’t matter that diverse groups had many different issues and causes in their quivers. What mattered most was the sense that they were united in seeing that citizens had the right to be free to live in their locales as they see fit.

So we came together to start a movement, and it looks as if it can only grow stronger through continued networking, organizing, and meetings. Two groups have tentatively offered to host a second convention next year, and the Christian Exodus people are proposing to start a discussion group among the convention attendees.

With the first North American Secession convention under our belt, what can we say about the strength of this movement?

First, that there are 16 real and active secessionist organizations, some new but some (like the League of the South and the Alaska Independence Party) in existence for decades. They have meetings, they send out newsletters, they have websites, and they travel around talking up their cause.

Here are some of them:

The Confederate Legion, based in Tennessee but with chapters as far away as Cairo, Illinois, has a youth contingent and a female auxiliary. Its delegate, "chief of staff" David Towery, said that the best places to recruit followers were the churches (since they were basically opposed to mainstream – insufficiently Christian – U.S. society anyway) and the bars. He claimed that they had 4,000 followers – people willing to sign statements in support of the new Confederate cause – and representatives in 16 states.

The League of the South also has chapters in 16 states and members in 11 others, and it has an active website (Dixienet.org), a bimonthly newspaper, and an annual conference attended by upwards of 300 people. They’ve been doing this for 12 years now, and say that every year they are winning new recruits.

The Second Vermont Republic may be one of the most active organizations, with a website and a newspaper, and in a statewide survey last winter garnered the support of 8 percent of Vermont’s population, a remarkable achievement for a group just three years old.

The New State Project, focused on New Hampshire, has some 3,000 people from all 50 states already signed up, and 200 have moved into the state, including the convention delegate, NSP Secretary Sandy Pierre, who has just moved from California. Pretty good for a movement also only three years old.

There are two other think-tanks in addition to the Middlebury Institute. The League of the South has an institute for the study of Southern culture, and Donald Livingston has an Abbeville Institute, with 40 active academic fellows, trying to “challenge the assumption that the Union should be preserved at all costs.” (Its motto: “Divided we stand, united we fall.”)

And remember, there are at least two dozen more groups out there that have claimed they support secession, though for one reason or another did not send representatives to the convention. My feeling is that we will hear from them shortly when they see that there’s a movement goin’ on and will want to be part of it.

A good start. I’ll keep you posted. •
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guisé as fascism. It was strange but satisfying to experience a greater bond—a kind of recognition, for lack of a better word—with folks whom I would have opposed a decade ago. I now feel more kinship with secession-minded folks than I feel with the GOP state-worshippers and conservative neo-fascists who used to be my close colleagues. The differences we might still hold from one another—social values, religion, folkways—need not be matters of contention if people are free to live in their locales as they see fit. One size does NOT fit all. Local culture and mores DO matter, and are to be cherished, not crushed.

If the people of Vermont would create a different kind of society with their freedom than the people of Alabama... well, I say, let a thousand flowers bloom.

Thomas Moore
Southern National Congress Committee
Alexandria, Virginia

Reviving Hydro

Vermont once ran on hydroelectric power. Our waterways powered sawmills, gristmills, and woolen mills. The force of water helped Vermonters produce doors, sash, fishing poles, bobbins, and much more.

Our waterways can generate power once again. We can do it with existing dams; we need not build more. So with energy independence as a goal, I’m collecting information for a new statewide assessment of hydropower potential in Vermont.

If you know of a spot with a dam, penstock, intake gate, powerhouse, or turbine generator not currently in use, please contact me at lorie@communityhydro.biz or (802) 434-8438.

Most of our towns have remnants of their hydroelectric histories. Much of it is housed in the wisdom of local historical societies. I’d welcome their information as well.

With hydroelectricity, we can make Vermont energy independent again. After all, there’s power in every drop.

Lori D. Barg
President, Community Hydro
Plainfield

Energy Innovators Abound, While Governor Looks Away

The state of Vermont recently hosted an energy summit supporting increased local production of power. It was attended by politicians, climatologists, power producers, and an array of others interested in the future of power production in the state.

Vermont is currently situated with an impressive array of plentiful, inexpensive, and relatively clean energy sources. This is likely to change dramatically in the next decade. Also made clear was the fact that there is near-complete consensus among scientists that global warming is real, it is accelerated by human activity, and we have a very finite period of time in which to act before an irrevocable chain of events is set into place that will have a profound impact on our species.

Also touched upon was the concept of onsite impact of energy production versus offsite impact. This is a new concept to many, but works on the premise that our production of energy often involves production of CO2 or nuclear waste. For example, when considering a 6-megawatt wind farm the onsite impact on bats and birds should now be compared to the impact on the world from the millions of tons of coal required and CO2 produced to generate the energy it would have created in its lifetime. Most experts agree that the only source of fuel plentiful enough to sustain our country until a revolutionary source is found is coal. As every kilowatt of energy produced from coal requires combustion of one pound of coal and produces 3 pounds of CO2 this is an easy calculation to make. Less simple is determining how much CO2 is required in our atmosphere before catalyptic effects result.

A keynote speech was given by our governor regarding old-fashioned Vermont ingenuity rising to the occasion to help secure our energy future. "Cow Power" and ethanol were given as examples of the "25 by 2025" initiative where 25 percent of Vermont's power will be renewable by 2025. Many great sound bytes were given regarding a bright future, however, we were not enlightened with any concrete plans of how this goal will be reached. Many in the audience remembered back to 2003 and the missed potential purchase of the Connecticut River dams, and came to the conclusion that Vermont would have been "25 by 2005" if the deal had been made. In a 1997 audit of undeveloped energy potential in Vermont the Department of Energy found that a potential 174 megawatts of power was possible from hydro sites in the state.

Wind power generated spirited debate as expected, with many, myself included, being confused that the same state that is leaving an indelible scar of high-tension poles and substations in the heart of the Champlain Valley is concerned regarding the industrialization of remote ridgelines. Wind remains the renewable energy source with the fastest growth worldwide, and other countries, including Sweden, are considering it a vital component of their energy plans. Interestingly, Sweden, known for its natural beauty and tourist industry, has tour itineraries that now include trips to observe their largest wind farm, which will soon grow by 1,000 turbines.

In the hydropower meeting we learned that Vermont once had 2,000 waterwheels and in 1940 derived 93 percent of its electricity from locally produced hydropower. Somewhere between 1940 and 1970 hydropower mysteriously transformed from the mainstay of power production in the state to being a source of alternative energy. At the time, nuclear power was hailed as an infinite source of clean energy. This plan disintegrated following unanticipated safety issues, but the antiquated legislation regarding hydropower written in the era still exists today.

The current designation of hydropower as "alternative" suggests that it is somehow optional and secondary. I argue that it may have been at one time, but it is no longer. It was once vital to the economy of Vermont and stands to be so again.

Many in our group fit the governor’s description as creative Vermonters rising to the call to help secure our energy future. Several other towns and sites around the state are similar to Middlebury in a desire to reclaim power from former sites with modern, low-impact production. We all had similar stories and concerns regarding the outdated regulations that effectively halt our progress and assure that the potential energy from the roughly 150 sites around the state will go untapped. Sites wishing to modernize to more efficient turbines will be unable to do so. Even in the best of circumstances Middlebury faces at least five years and hundreds of pages of applications before learning if we are allowed to proceed with the project. The consensus in the room was clear that regulations need to change, very soon.

For regulations to change, legislation must change. Alaska is faced with a similar problem and may serve as a template for Vermont. Legislation was introduced in 1991 as a national plan to lower use of oil and to promote energy security. Only Alaska thus far has been able to take measures removing federal licensing for low-impact sites less than 5 megawatts. The criteria for low-impact designation remain strict however, several layers of redundant bureaucracy have been removed and the process made more efficient. A recent survey of potential low-impact hydropower suggested that there is a potential of more than 170 megawatts from either reestablished sites or modernization of existing sites. Vermonters clearly have the ingenuity and resources to take back control of our energy future. All we need is to be empowered to do so.

Why is a surgeon so concerned about energy? I am cognizant of and concerned regarding problems with our healthcare system. As a Vermont native I am also concerned regarding unsustainable taxes, family farms going out of business and highly trained friends leaving the state looking for greener pastures. Vermont exports $1 billion per year for energy, a far cry from the 1940s. Reclaiming even a modest portion of this would lead to a huge increase in a tax base that is straining to support our state. Any agenda promoting true affordability should see this as an absolute certainty.

We have seen the effect of volatile fuel prices on our economy, and it is not much of a stretch to speculate the effect on Vermont’s fiscal future if expensive and unreliable electricity is added to the equation. I fear this will have a ripple effect that will harm other facets of our way of life. My interest in the Middlebury project has given me a front row seat from which to observe the energy debate, and I predict other problems in the state may be magnified greatly as a result of this single issue. Our current governor is open to the idea of a new base load plant fueled by coal or natural gas. This will likely be a coal plant in the 500-megawatt range, will require years of planning and construction and will need to be rushed to be on line before 2012. A 500-MW coal plant will consume two million tons of coal per year and spew seven million tons of CO2 into the atmosphere. This will have a projected cost of $2 billion, and as it will be out of Vermont’s price range it will probably be funded by the same out-of-state investors that are causing so much concern with wind farms.

This and an outdated nuclear facility appear to be the mainstay of our bright energy future. Power will come from somewhere, but at what cost?

Anders Holm, MD
Middlebury, Vermont
Vermont Vox Populi  A Conversation with “Farmers Diner” Owner Tod Murphy

Vermont Commons Editor Rob Williams interviewed Tod Murphy at his new Farmers Diner location in Quechee.

When most of us hear the word “diner,” we may be reminded of our favorite local Ma and Pa “greasy spoon” joint. Explain the radical concept – serving food mostly acquired from within a 100-mile radius – behind your notion of a “Farmers Diner.”

Gee, I wouldn’t call what we do here at the Farmers Diner “radical.” Given the popularity of the restaurant with so many people from various political and social backgrounds, the restaurant seems pretty mainstream, in terms of what people say they value when given the chance to express themselves. Things like great-tasting food that comes from real farmers and folks who live nearby.

I hear you, but your business model is radical in the sense that it gets to the root causes behind the problems associated with a global corporate/industrial food model where the average piece of food in the United States travels 1,200 miles to reach our plates.

Our goal of spending 70 cents of every food dollar within 50 to 75 miles is radical for a business in a global economy where greed – a.k.a. maximizing profit and externalizing costs – is commonplace. But to regular citizens, I don’t think we are radical. Great-tasting food and a good cause, but not radical.

How did you first come up with the idea for the Farmers Diner?

Oh, I talk about a caffeine-induced epiphany. There is the logical, western, tortured-by-empiricism answer that says I rationally was thinking about how to move all the great food on the farms into the community in a way that was approachable for all types of citizens and, by process of elimination, came up with the idea for a diner. There is also the answer that life wants this type of business, that the way humans have been doing business in the past has been destructive, so we’re trying to bring about businesses and societies that are about ways of creating better health and stronger local relationships. Our culture places great value on the idea of the individual, who conquers in some heroic way – a flash of brilliant insight, an achievement of great physical prowess. However, most of what is required to create a world of health and connection comes from dogged persistence and integrity, values that are not canonized in our cynical culture.

I ate at the old Farmers Diner in Barre many times, and really enjoyed it. Why the move to Quechee?

Farmers Diner has been a process, a series of iterations working toward the goal of being a restaurant that is financially sustainable, as well as ecologically, culturally, and agriculturally sustainable. There was and is a great deal of skepticism about the viability of the model of purchasing local food and serving it at what Wendell Berry calls “democratically priced” levels. So, we started small to test out much of the model and learn what we needed to know without incurring a great deal of debt. Barre was a 50-seat diner with a tiny kitchen. Given many of the regulatory issues and other costs of doing business, a small family-priced restaurant is difficult to operate at a profit, particularly given the intensity of labor needed to manage local food in the kitchen. So, we decided to close Barre once we learned as much as we could there, and move to a location that was larger – 120 seats – so we could generate greater cash flow to cover the management expenses.

How has business been in the new location?

We’ve been busy for the first two months working out the kinks, being swamped by tourists for foliage, and then spent November catching our breaths and finishing up the missing details from pre-opening. Now, we are starting to build our business with the local community, putting together author reading events, going to chamber of commerce functions, doing catering for office meetings, those types of things.

What are some of the new opportunities and challenges on the horizon for you?

We want to “let the paint dry” at Quechee and learn what we still have to learn. This restaurant requires a greater volume of all the products we use, and this has caused some new problems to solve in terms of the adequacy of supply – dairy, as one example. Because we opened at the end of the summer, we scrambled to find enough local produce, so we are putting together a meeting with farmers to plan out production for next year. We started making our own pickles, and realized that, given the volume of pickles we go through, we are likely going to have to put together an acre or so of pickling/cuke production. So, we are focused on nailing down the operational aspects of Quechee, building the supply chain, and learning more of the details about how this business model works at a low retail price point.

Can your “pilot project” help point the way for Vermont becoming a more independent and sustainable place to live in this new century?

Wow. That sounds pretty big. I’ve certainly learned a great deal about what is required and what is possible for a robust independent food economy for Vermont. Wendell Berry has outlined the principles for a thriving local economy. Step one is meet your own needs to the maximum degree from your own resources. As every politician has repeatedly pointed out, Vermont has many great resources on the food economy front, but the “talk-to-do ratio” for most public institutions needs improving. We know that Vermont can certainly produce all of its own dairy needs and then ship the excess to regional market. We could do the same for grains, legumes, storage vegetables, fresh and canned vegetables and proteins (both meat and soy-based). What is required are the infrastructure industries – like Vermont Butter and Cheese, the Soy Project up in Hardwick, Vermont Smoke & Cure in Barre, PT

continued on following page
Do you think the state of Vermont should become its own independent republic, as it was from 1777-1791? I think this is a great question as a starter to think about how we live currently versus how we want to live. Here’s what I think is really behind that question. The national culture – socially, economically, politically – is unsatisfying. It doesn’t call on us as citizens to some type of life that is greater than our own lusts, greed, and individual fulfillment. It is a culture that is destructive, divisive, and complex beyond our ability to fathom.

What we want of a place as humans, as citizens, is to live with a culture that is healthy – economically, emotionally, physically. We can measure some of those things – survival rates for babies, alcohol and drug use, size of people’s paycheck, cleanliness in drinking water – but some of the foundation stones of a healthy culture are harder to measure.

The Vermont independence question, I believe, has behind it these concerns and frustrations. The public discussion I have heard has, at times, sounded like a bit of a fairy tale, that somehow by leaving the Union, we would be free from the oligarchs that run the United States, we would be free from the politics of Washington. The fairy tale in this is the belief that the problem is out there beyond us and if we can pull away from the bullies we will be better. I think we are living in a Faulkner novel, only now the Snopes aren’t running the town, they are running the entire country. And they will run an independent republic unless citizens decide to start taking responsibility for their lives, their communities, their places.

And this is exactly what Vermont Commons proposes that Vermonters do. To stop looking to Washington, D.C., and multinational corporations to solve our 21st-century problems, and instead start de-centralizing and re-localizing political and economic power in our own communities here in the Green Mountains.

We are in trouble every time we think the solution is outside of us. We have to live committed to the health of the place where we live – our homes, our land, our neighbors, our towns. From that base of health, we can create the changes we want to see in the world. Believing that a new republic will resolve issues if we don’t change how we live is foolishness.

I couldn’t agree more, Tod. Thanks for sharing your wisdom here, and good luck with the Farmers Diner.

Discover more about the Farmers Diner at www.farmersdiner.com •
Designs for Bart Merle-Smith’s Hot Tub Emporium 2 in Burlington Vermont. This space ship in an enormous warehouse has private hot tub spa compartments in each car that are designed to transport one to another world. Such as “Krypton, Superman’s birth planet.”

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Greetings to all friends and supporters of a Second Vermont Republic!

We have had a busy fall, pouring our energies into a number of foundational projects to help move us into this new year. These include:

1) SVR as Think Tank: We’ve re-envisioned SVR as a think tank and “voluntary civic association” that provides a place for any interested individual or organization to help us think about and move toward re-inventing the state of Vermont as an independent republic once again, as it existed between 1777 and 1791. While we don’t offer any “memberships” in the Second Vermont Republic, we do welcome your support, and heartily encourage anyone interested in offering their time, energy, money, or talent to building a Second Vermont Republic to please contact us at info@vermontrepublic.org.

2) SVR Web Site: We encourage you to explore our newly re-designed SVR web site: www.vermontrepublic.org. Along with our once-a-month “Free Vermont” electronic newsletter, the SVR web site is our primary way of distributing information about our growing “Free Vermont” SVR movement. At the web site, you can read, distribute, and contribute to a growing variety of essays and papers related to Vermont independence and secession generally. Please contact us with any suggestions or ideas you may have.

3) SVR’s Symbol and Store: We’ve adopted one of the more recognizable flags of Ethan Allen and the Green Mountain Boys as our own SVR symbol. More than any other Vermonters in history, perhaps, the Green Mountain Boys embodied the courage, tenacity, and vision we’ll need as we work together to reach our goal of Vermont independence. You can buy SVR T-shirts, bumper stickers, lapel pins, magnets, and yes, flags, at our new online store. By purchasing from our store, you can champion Vermont independence, as well as support our efforts.

4) Independence Petition: We continue to grow international support for Vermont independence through our citizen petition calling on the state of Vermont to peaceably secede from the United States. You can read and sign the petition at our web site, and join the close-to 1,500 citizens from 13 countries and 48 of the 50 states who have already signed on.

5) SVR Speakers Bureau: At the urging of many of our supporters, we’ve put together an SVR Speakers Bureau – close to one dozen Vermont men and women from different backgrounds and areas of expertise who all support the creation of an independent Vermont Republic. Our hope is to use the Speaker’s Bureau in the months and years ahead to expand the conversation about Vermont independence to towns across our state. We charge a nominal $100 speaking fee to cover the costs of our speakers’ fuel, food, and time. If you’d like to request someone to come and speak on the topic of Vermont independence in your community, please don’t hesitate to contact us at info@vermontrepublic.org.

6) SVR Advisory Board: We’ve also spent the fall assembling an SVR advisory board, including some of the continent’s foremost scholars, researchers, and advocates of peaceable secession, thinkers like the Abbeville Institute’s Donald Livingston, Maine decentralist and author Carolyn Chute, the Middlebury Institute’s Kirkpatrick Sale, and our own University of Vermont scholar, author, and town meeting expert Frank Bryan, whose essay on Vermont independence is featured on page 1 of this issue.

7) SVR’s News Box Initiative: Working together with “Vermont Commons,” our sister organization, we’ve commissioned Mad River Valley Bobbin Mill entrepreneur Barry Simpson to design beautiful wooden news boxes to distribute Vermont Commons newspapers and advertise SVR’s presence in town and business locations around our state. We’re currently conducting a “pilot project” of six news boxes at Mad River Valley businesses (check our town-by-town list at the web site to see at which businesses you can pick up Vermont Commons), and our hope is to quickly grow our “news box network” to reach all 256 of Vermont’s rural towns and communities. Each box costs $25 to assemble and ship, and we have a small budget to make boxes available for free to any interested Vermont citizen or business. To purchase or request a free news box for a business in your town, please contact us at info@vermontrepublic.org after you make the necessary arrangements, and we’ll ship you one, in addition to making arrangements to distribute to your news box 40-50 copies of each future Vermont Commons quarterly.

8) SVR “200 Towns By 2012” Town Meeting Initiative: Based on the encouraging results of our 2006 University of Vermont Center for Rural Studies poll – 8 percent of our Green Mountain state’s population (38,000 Vermonters) indicate their support for Vermont independence – we’ve decided to begin growing a “200 Towns By 2012” FREE VERTON town meeting initiative. By March 2012, six years from now, our goal is to put to a town meeting vote (in at least 200 towns) a one-sentence resolution calling on the state legislature to call a special session for the purpose of debating whether or not Vermont should peaceably secede from the United States. We’re building a grassroots network of Vermont citizens interested in collecting signatures for Town Meeting Day 2012. We already have citizens from four towns – Moretown, Waitsfield, Warren, and Jericho – signed up. If you are a civically minded Vermonter interested in Vermont independence, one who is planning on living here long-term, please contact us at info@vermontrepublic.org to get involved.

9) SVR in the News: We have been busy this fall, and our work has been covered by many major media outlets and journalists, including Paul Nussbaum at the Philadelphia Inquirer, Elizabeth Mehren at the Los Angeles Times, and our own Tom Slayton at Vermont Life magazine (see the winter 2007 issue for an essay on “Vermont as Once and Future Republic”). You can, of course, read all of these articles at our web site. Rumor is that “Hustler” and “Orion” magazines (now there’s a pairing) are currently exploring the secession idea, too. We’ll keep you posted.

And time is on our side. As the United States Empire continues to totter, and “big picture” dilemmas unique to the 21st century – global Peak Oil and global climate change to name but two – unfold, we at the Second Vermont Republic remain committed to extricating ourselves from the United States through the collective exercise of our constitutional right to secede.

Secesssion, after all, is every American’s birthright.

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believe, are locked in theoretical dilemmas that haunt us with horrific imaginings. I recommend we suspend these imaginings. Not because we can resolve the imaginary dilemmas conjured by our worst fears, but because we can reduce them to reasonable expectations that then can be managed in the future.

Here, I will deal with the most perverse of our fears and establish the premise needed to exorcize it.

**Facing (Illusory) Fear: The Myth of Vermont’s Federal Dollar Dependency**

Time and time again, the first question I am asked by anyone contemplating secession is: how could Vermont survive without all that federal money coming in?

Answer: The "We Couldn’t Survive Without All That Federal Money Coming In" argument is a myth. Simply stated, the "federal fiscal ratio" no longer favors Vermont. The United States is costing us money.

Some context:

At the core, the "United States" no longer is. The union of states, the federal system we in Vermont agreed to in 1791 after 14 years as an independent republic, no longer exists.

The "United States" – a federal system in which the citizens of each individual state are sovereign – has been replaced, over time, by a unitary and imperious federal government that is daily becoming more intrusive.

As a consequence, we are rapidly losing touch with our democracy, for deciding issues of political significance on a human scale – where both the causes and the consequences of collective action are within ordinary citizens’ grasp – is the oxygen of democracy.

Without an active civic life, democracy strangles and dies.

I do not have a name for what happened during this past fall’s election season in the United States. But I do know it was not democracy.

**Fiscal Federalism Honestly Appraised**

As Americans, we have been conditioned to believe that fiscal federalism involves a positive economy of scale – that our membership in a union of ‘states’ means we get more from the United States government than we give.

What would we do without all those federal tax monies that come in via Washington from other states?

Indeed, the Framers created the “United States” only after each state was given two Senators, irrespective of its size. While hardly “democratic,” the fact that Vermont can trump New York in a legislative chamber through which all national legislation must pass indicates that the Framers intended to ensure that the citizens of the Green Mountains would not be swallowed up by the Union.

But, after the War Between the States (1861-1865), the “United States” shifted from a federal system to a de facto unitary system. The smaller states continue to receive more in federal aid than they give up in taxes paid.

But not much.

For Vermont, it’s hardly anything. And what we do get is clearly not worth the price (either in real dollars or indirect effects – which are all negative).

Here is the fundamental dilemma: The vast majority of Vermonters don’t know this.

They don’t know this because of what they hear and read about is all the “extra” money our heroic D.C. representatives – Messrs. Sanders, Leahy, Jeffords, and now Welch – are siphoning off from a tax pool provided by the bigger, richer states.

Thus, the mythological argument goes, weaning ourselves from the federal teat would be a fiscal disaster.

How many times have we heard the cry “Yeah, sure. Secede? And what are we going to do without all those federal dollars?”

To which we should reply: What federal dollars?

The fundamental measure used by scholars to measure fiscal federalism is found in the Tax Foundation’s “Federal Fiscal Federalism Honestly Appraised” tables based on Census Bureau data. A summary of Vermont’s “take” (in federal dollars) from Washington as a ratio of Washington’s “take” (in taxes) from Vermont over the last quarter century looks like this:

Incredibly, the average yearly Vermont “take” from the federal government, beginning with the latest year for which data are available (2004) and going back to 1981, is one cent ($0.01) on the dollar. For every dollar we pay in federal taxes we get back a dollar plus a penny. One cent!

Vermont’s “advantage” among the other states is a myth. Where a rank of “1” means we had the best ratio of taxes in to taxes out of the 50 states, and a rank of “50” means we had the worst ratio, Vermont’s average yearly rank was 30. Vermont not only failed to achieve a “small-state advantage,” its average rank was below the average state, irrespective of size.

The data reveal no partisan advantage. Our best “take” took place under the first four years of George W. Bush (2001-2004), when we averaged $1.12 on the dollar. Our highest overall ranking was during Reagan’s first term. Our average ranking between 1981 and 1984 was 19 (where a rank of 1 is best). On the other hand, our worst eight years were Reagan’s second four years and Bush senior’s four years – for both ranking among the states and the actual “take” in monies received. Under the Clinton presidency, our yearly rankings averaged 30 (the average for the quarter century) and the “take” averaged $1.02, again almost precisely Vermont’s average take for the 24-year data set.

Overall, the size advantage (at least for recent years) is not strong. For instance, population size explained only 17 percent of the variance in state rankings on fiscal advantage in 2004. In this year, Vermont’s ranking fell three ranks below its size-projected ratio of taxes paid to federal monies coming back.

But in matters like these, it is best to be conservative in making the case. Let us assume, therefore, that the “one cent on the dollar” average is somehow wrong – that Vermont would, in the future, do much better than that. In fact, let us assume that in the future, we can count on 10 times our quarter-century average, $1.10 of federal money back for each dollar of federal money in.

Mind you, during the 24 years used in this analysis, Vermont only reached that amount five times. And
Spending Money to Get Money

It costs money to get money. Vermont public sector grant writers (state, local, and not-for-profit employees) estimate that it costs from 5 cents to 15 cents to do the work to secure one dollar of federal grant money. I tend to think these estimates are high, because many very large grants take little more time to prepare than other smaller grants, thus lowering the “cost to prepare the grant per dollar of money received” ratio.

Still, the higher overall estimates may be quite close to reality, because it also costs money to complete the federally mandated, detailed audits of how the money received was actually spent. Also, not all federal grants applied for are received. This jacks up the average cost for those that are.

And some grants require a dual procedure. The state first applies for federal money in large (usually relatively inexpensive-to-prepare) grants, and then local governments and not-for-profits apply for these grants from the state. Finally it is likely (I am told – and I believe it) that many local citizens and town officers either underestimate or actually donate their time to write grants. Human energy thus employed is human energy not available for other projects. It has value.

But again, let us be conservative and say that it only takes the lowest of the estimates to ask for and receive federal money – 5 cents on the dollar.

Now, even the exaggerated amount of “federal bonus” money we might receive from the federal government has been cut in half, from a dime a buck to a nickel. But the real cost of federal money is worse, much worse. This is because it is often the case that in order to receive money for projects we Vermonters need and want, we must include these requests as part of larger projects we don’t need and don’t want.

Estimating the cost of this subterfuge is impossible. But, drawing from 40 years studying Vermont governance and from 25 years teaching UVM public management graduate courses, I can tell you it happens quite a bit. How often?

The United States is costing us money. . .

Why don’t we act on behalf of peaceable secession, and the re-creation of Vermont as an independent republic? The primary reason is fear.

The United States is a nation (some say an empire) of gold, and an announcement that he will lead them off hillsides of the land of the American conscience. The federal government is a nation, and an announcement that he will lead them off hillsides of the land of the American conscience. Our planning processes in Vermont (and I have often been a critic of them) are among the most grassroots in the United States. Thousands of citizens spend hundreds of hours yearly working in our towns and cities to keep them fresh and creative.

Then comes the beaming federal flutist with a bag full of gold, and an announcement that he will lead them off in a different direction.

Remember. This is not an argument that the huge majority of “federal” money is not well-spent and hugely important.

I only wish to emphasize the fact that they are not giving us money from New York or New Hampshire (one of the states most severely hit by the federal fiscal grants) or even California. It is our money. And all they are doing is giving it back to us. The federal government is a fiscal liability. We are paying them to tell us how to spend our own money.

And even if this were not so, which would you rather have – $1,000,000 of your own money to spend as you wish, or $1,050,000 of my money to spend as I tell you to?

To summarize: in analyzing the “Vermont need federal dollars” myth, we have weighted our assumptions against ourselves as follows: the amount of money Vermonters will receive from the federal government as a ratio of what we pay in taxes to the federal government will average in the future 10 times what it has averaged in the last quarter century.

Even when we do this our claim stands!

The “What will we do without all that federal money?” fear is wrong-headed and based on a myth.

So, with this fear properly exorcized, we can more freely consider Vermont’s peaceable secession from the United States. For the best way to preserve our capacity to live independently is to maintain a government of human scale, where the need to be controlled is balanced by the ability to do some controlling oneself.

Vermont is such a place.

And the United States is a nation (some say an empire) over which we Vermonters no longer have much, if any, control.

Let us get up on our hind legs, then, and send a message of peaceable secession to the nation from the frost-bound hillsides of the land of the American conscience.

Vermont – the once and future republic – this is where I stand. •
Route 100 “flags memorial” to U.S. soldiers killed in Iraq. March 2007 will mark the fourth year of the U.S. occupation. Nobel Prize winning economist Joseph Stiglitz puts the war’s price tag at more than $2 trillion. Between 150,000 and 650,000 Iraqis are dead. And here in the Green Mountains of Vermont, we have the highest Iraq War casualty rate, per capita, of any state in the nation. PHOTO BY ROB WILLIAMS
Do you dream of a free Vermont? So do we, and the stories told in the media we consume can help us reimagine what an independent Vermont might look like. Vermont Commons readers are vociferous media hounds. We like books. We enjoy films. (And if you haven’t yet seen “Syriana,” “Who Killed the Electric Car,” “An Inconvenient Truth,” or “V for Vendetta,” all four are now out on DVD. Each one, in its own way, makes a compelling case for secession and economic re-localization.) Heck, we even play video games. If someone out there wants to design us a Sim City-like piece of software that helps us imagine how Vermont independence might play out (positively, we hope), we’re all ears.

Starting with this issue, we’ll be regularly serving up our favorite multimedia resources for a free Vermont. Here’s what’s been on my night table of late.

Isn’t secession a “racist plot”? Didn’t Americans already fight a “civil war” to “free the slaves” and “preserve the Union”? Only Americans who learn their history from Ken Burns PBS documentaries, the History Channel, and corporate textbook companies could believe such a thing. Which is to say, most of us accept these statements as fact without question.

The reality, of course, is that secession has been a widely practiced political tool for people throughout the centuries, and Americans, after founding the new U.S. Republic on secessionist principles (read Jefferson’s 1776 “Declaration of Independence”) gave secession legs by enshrining it in both the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights. I know – we never learn any of this in school or from the TV. Re-educating ourselves about our own history takes time and effort.

Both Northerners (New Englanders seriously considered secession from the United States no fewer than six times before 1860) and Southerners embraced secession as a viable political option during the first 70 years of this nation’s history, until Republican Party co-founder, corporate railroad lawyer, and minority president Abraham Lincoln prosecuted an unconstitutional, illegal, and immoral war to keep the southern states in the Union (1961-1865). In the process, of course, “Honest Abe” re-invented our country as a single, unitary state/empire (“the United States ARE a nation,” rather than the ante-bellum “the United States ARE a nation”), and made it a happy and prosperous place for giant multinational corporations (the railroads, for starters, the first billion-dollar corporate entities in world history), consolidated private banking interests, and massive state-sponsored “internal improvements” funded by taxpayers’ money without taxpayers’ consent.

No one tells this story better than Loyola College economist Thomas J. DiLorenzo, first in “The Real Lincoln” (reviewed in our May 2005 issue, available online) and now in “Lincoln Unmasked: What You’re Not Suppose To Know About Honest Abe” (New York: Crown Forum, 2006). While the book is lean, clocking in at under 200 pages, you’ll learn more about the real Abraham Lincoln than you ever have before. Guaranteed.


To get more provocative for a moment, most folks I know who dismiss citizens advocating “9/11 Truth” as “conspiracy theorists” have rarely bothered, it turns out, to closely examine the evidence surrounding the 9/11 attacks. While there have been dozens of books written about 9/11 Truth – good, bad, and otherwise - Canadian journalist Barry Zwicker’s “Towers of Deception: The Media Cover-Up of 9/11” (Canada: New Society Publishers, 2006) is the most accessible 9/11 Truth work I’ve read to date. While Zwicker focuses on reviewing the corporate/mainstream “news” media’s complicity in failing to mount a sustained systematic investigation of the evidence sur-
Thought for front
On the food front, I just finished Vermont author Linda Faillace’s remarkable “Mad Sheep: The True Story behind the USDA’s War On A Family Farm” (White River Junction: Chelsea Green, 2005). Reading about how the federal USDA made legal, political, and economic war on the Faillace family’s sheep farm, a struggle that went on for years, is incredibly sobering, though Faillace writes with optimism, personality, and heart. “The Omnivore’s Dilemma: A Natural History in Four Meals,” Michael Pollan’s latest book (New York: Penguin Press, 2006), made the rounds this past summer and fall in our central Vermont community, though I’ve just finished only recently. If ever there was a thoughtful, reasoned, thorough case for local eating whenever possible, this is it.

In a nod to two other Vermont authors, I just recently read and can recommend two small but powerful books for their compressed thoughtfulness. Peter Forbes’ “What Is A Whole Community? A Letter To Those Who Care For and Restore the Land” (Fayston: Center for Whole Communities, 2006) is a beautifully rendered love letter to land and people, while Peggy Sapphire’s A Possible Explanation (Virginia: Partisan Press, 2006) explores life’s often-painful journey through gritty and graceful poetry. Two slim volumes you’ll visit and revisit.

And finally, I just experienced the side-splittingly funny “Sky Mall: Happy Crap You Can Buy From A Plane” (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2006). And it IS an experience. You know the real Sky-Mall catalogs, the ones that hawk those absurd-but-tantalizing products you suddenly think you need while flying at 30,000 feet, until your rational brain kicks in? (“Hey look! Self-cleaning golf ball holders!”) Wait a minute, I haven’t played golf in years, but even if I did, I can clean my own damn dimples.)

Well, feast your eyes on the “Reality-Canceling Headphone,” the “Crack Pipe Chess Set,” the “Adultery Detector,” the “Llamacycle,” some “Pepper Self-Spray,” and other insanely funny parodied products – complete with visuals – that will make you laugh out loud. The comedy troupe Kasper Hauser, who produced this work of genius, have made guffawing more fun than ever. And a little laughter goes a long way in these interesting times.

That’s what’s been on my night table, dreaming of an independent Vermont. •

Hennessey continued from page 1

It’s amazing how different fantasy and reality can be. We’d given no serious thought to management, just vague ideas about keeping the meadows open. So we borrowed a tractor and brush-hogged 80 acres of rough, leggy hilltop meadow that first fall. It was a miserable experience with lots of broken parts, diesel bills, and terrifying passes across our high-angle terrain. We ended up miserable enough to decide never to do it again.

We could have let the true forces of nature take over. Vermont entropy = forestation. But it became apparent that we couldn’t let our open land slip into forest, leaving all of our forebearers’ toil in the dirt. Perhaps there’s something inherent in the human conceit that drives us to manage and mold rather than let things go. So we decided to keep it open.

But could we do it without compromising our environmental ethic? Might we use the farm without abusing it? We spent that winter of 2000 researching – reading, listening and learning – and settled on a farm strategy that focused on management-intensive grazing, a grass-based pastoral method that mimics natural processes better than most industrial-based agricultural approaches.

We began with 13 Angus cows and a few horses, not nearly enough animals to keep ahead of our grass. Seven years later, we’re raising 80 head of Angus, 200 sheep, 20 pigs, 400 broiler chickens, 150 layer hens and six horses – all rotated over the same stretches of ground. Our ruminants (cows and sheep) are fed entirely on grass, while our poultry, pigs, and horses receive supplemental grain on top of their sweety diverse pasture portions. In the process, our soils have increased in fertility and organic matter without amendments. Even our vegetable gardens rely on grass as tilled-in fertility for each subsequent season.

Grass became the central part of our operation for a number of reasons, most notably the miracle of a ruminant’s ability to extract solar energy out of grass. We also wanted to minimize our use of fossil fuels by allowing the animals to harvest their own feed. And then there are the fringe benefits: building soil fertility and eliminating erosion, reducing our contribution to water pollution, eliminating the use of herbicides, pesticides and chemical fertilizers, breaking the parasite cycles, good exercise for both us and our animals, fresh air, and the joy of seeing and hearing those first mouthfuls of fresh salad in all those mouths everyday.

In short, we are striving for a farm full of healthy and happy animals who express their essential natures, animals that provide the healthiest and tastiest food possible.

Being outside the mainstream means that we have to market directly to health-conscious consumers who are willing to pay for the real costs of food. Our customers come to trust us and the foods we provide.

The practice of intensive grazing
During the grazing season, we daily move our animals to fresh pasture. The paddocks are sized to accommodate each group’s daily needs for feed. Depending on the time of year, we’ll let each paddock rest and recover anywhere from 14 to 30 days before returning to it for another grazing session. In our program, the idea is to graze each pasture when the grass is at the height of its adolescent energy – well grown, but not to the mature seed-head stage. This process allows the animals to gain the greatest benefit from the grass, while allowing the grass the best chance to recover fully before the next grazing. Many species of young weeds that are either eaten or trampled can’t seed out, and are eventually overtaken by harder grasses adapted to growing back quickly. Daily movement naturally distributes manure and increases organic matter and fertility on the farm.

continued on page 16
equipment to make hay and baleage for the winter months, we finish cattle for market using about half the fossil fuel energy of confinement or feedlot methods. The natural distribution of manure alone saves hundreds of gallons of fuel each year. Additionally, our farm remains a very low risk for nutrient loading or “eutrophication” – the process by which large amounts of phosphorus from farm fertilizers make their way into our local watersheds, causing algae blooms and other plant growth that chokes our waterways, robs our living waters of oxygen, and destroys other local aquatic life.

The benefits to our farm family are embedded in our everyday life. Working outside within the natural seasonal cycle, and orchestrating carefully timed movement of five different animal groups on the same piece of land, has its own intrinsic rewards.

Challenges
Lately, we’ve had a good laugh over the parable of the First and Second Mouse as they approach a newly set mousetrap. Both tremendous potential and great risks abound. While the First Mouse explores the new potential, the Second Mouse, of course, nearly always gets the cheese. Wind turbines that are down more than they’re running, solar water heaters that ice up in a mild winter, silver bullet winter-grazing ideas that fail due to timing, incredibly industrious beavers, and excessive climate-change related rainfall place us as a farm family squarely in the realm of the early adopter.

With any method there are challenges, and management-intensive grazing is no different. Currently it takes us twice as long to finish beef steers on grass in Vermont as it does to finish steers on grain. This means we take our steers through two winters before market – an expensive proposition. It is also difficult to raise grass-fed beef and lamb with as much intramuscular fat (marbling) as conventional meats. The result can be toughness, though we’ve made great strides in this area through rotation management. Finishing an animal is commonly thought of as the feed regimen during the last 60 days before slaughter.

Conventional beef is finished on corn and soybeans in feedlots. The grass-fed animal is finished on grass (of course), a process that requires timing the steers’ weight with the height of feed energy in the pasture. Many grass-fed producers assume that finishing should happen during the fall, and only bring their animals to market after the perennial pasture has essentially stopped growing (known as the ‘last blade of grass’ method).

But extensive research shows that finishing at that time of year is actually the worst time to do so, as most native perennials have lignified – meaning they have stored the majority of their carbohydrates and proteins in the roots, leaving a woody, less palatable plant with significantly less nutrition. By ‘finish timing’ I mean that we time our calf births so that they are about two years old when we hit the height of our pasture energy (usually June, July and early August). And, currently, we only take our steers to market during these months, as their daily weight gains on grass are at their peak, producing the fat marbling in the steer muscle that is an essential ingredient to tenderness.

Our management-intensive grazing methods sit outside the norm of the corporate/industrial farming paradigm. It follows that our marketing is going to be different, as well. Obviously, we could not be sustainable financially if we were paid at commodity prices. In addition to our increased time to market, we do not have the unfair advantage of heavily subsidized grain production enjoyed by conventional producers.

Being outside the mainstream also means that we have to market directly to health-conscious consumers who are willing to pay for the real costs of food. As tough and time-consuming as direct marketing can be, it comes with a distinct benefit. Our customers get to know us personally, and through that relationship they come to trust us, and the foods we provide. We joke with our friends that we specialize in “recovering vegetarians” – which is not far from the truth, as we’ve had several vegetarians and even vegans start eating our meat for health reasons.

What’s next?
We’re not satisfied. We want to extend grass-farming and rotational grazing into new frontiers. Currently, we’re looking seriously at developing enough stockpiled pasture to take all our animals through the winter without making hay. Seeding high-value, cold-tolerant winter annuals into our pastures may be a part of this program.

Looking for the same health benefits from grass-fed dairy products that we find in our meats, we’re considering seasonal, once-a-day milking of cows or sheep to offer high-value, healthy milk, yogurt and cheese without using grain.

It’s tempting to depict our methods and elements as components in a finely run machine. Far from perfect, the farm is our attempt to stage a wildly complex interaction between soils, plants, animals, and people, to the benefit of all.

Green Mountain Gourmet. Maple Wind Farm chicken, home-grown potatoes, and peas from the Champlain Valley combine to make for savory winter fare. Wash it down with a Vermont micro-brew or regional glass du vin. Magnifique! Read Bill McKibben on eating locally through the winter at www.vtcommons.org. PHOTO BY ROB WILLIAMS
“Take Back Vermont – In 1929
Vrest Orton and Green Mountain Independence

By Nicholas Clifford

One hundred and fifty years ago a band of intrepid pioneers imbued with the principles of liberty, and inspired by sentiments of freedom, declared it was necessary for a people so imbued and inspired to assume amongst the powers of the earth that separate and equal station to which the laws of Nature and Nature’s God entitled them. They further declared that, all men being possessed of a right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, a proper government must be instituted to insure these inalienable rights, and that any government destructive of them ought to be altered or abolished.”

Madison, Jefferson, and the Founding Fathers, of course. Who else?

Wrong. “By this utterance and this choice the founders of Vermont put a period to the incursions of all such powers, whether in the Province of New York or in the Kingdom of Great Britain…”

So in 1929, wrote Vrest Orton. Best remembered today as the man who started the Vermont Country Store in 1946, he’d been a writer long before that, and, after working for H.L. Mencken’s American Mercury, was back home by the late 1920s. There he became a contributor to, among other journals, The Drift-Wind, a quirky little literary magazine founded a few years earlier by Walter Coates, a former Universalist minister determined to encourage Vermont letters.

Here in its pages, Orton mounted a crusade against those who sought to undermine his state’s native character, despoil her natural beauty, and exploit her human qualities for their own profit. Vermont’s enemies were those who wanted to “sell” and develop it, turning it into another Florida or New Jersey, and they were to be found in “Chambers of Commerce, Rotary Clubs, Kiwanis Clubs, and allied commercialized snob-organizations in the towns and cities…” Their actions, if not blocked, “would remove…Vermont’s most delectable charm, which charm lies in its independence, its size and its dissimilitude to other states as well as in its power to resist the degrading influences other states have succumbed to.”

The state’s future, Orton proclaimed, did not lie in turning itself into a summer playground for tired city-dwellers, or a “great booze highway to Canada,” or a site for billboards and hot-dog stands. Vermont’s high purpose, rather, was “to constitute an empire for persons of free thought, active mind, high standards and aspirations, and cultivated imagination.”

So he deplored the lack of leadership that should have come from the state’s politicians and clergy (it’s unclear what he thought of Governor John Weeks, the Salisbury dairy farmer whose program of highway modernization probably did more to bring in outsiders than anything else prior to Eisenhower’s interstate system). By January 1929, Orton had moved into high gear, issuing in The Drift-Wind a proclamation from a Vigilance Committee showing “How to Make Vermont Free” (it’s unclear how many committee members there were besides Orton himself). Here he inveighed against “the Babbitts,” intent on turning Vermont into a place where “in a few years there will be nothing but Jerry-built roadside shacks, summer camps, hot dog stands, sub-divisions of towns never to be completed, crazy realtor officers, a crowd of widows and orphans fleeced by promoters, inflated banks whose paper is worthless and whose money is invested in Missouri, amusement parks, cable railways to mountain tops, wide, horribly straight cement trunk-highways, towns of cheap-john houses alike as so many peas, factories belching smoke, crushing the workers and breaking their souls…”

“We advocate that Vermont set itself up as a Republic, independent and free from all other governing and social influences.” — Vrest Orton

…while everywhere would appear billboards, “massive, gaudy and hideous sign-boards…”

Such horrors, he declared, were “basically un-Vermontish” and should be “squashed in the bud.”

But how?

Surely there was only one sensible answer, and it was drawn from Wilsonian self-determination.

“We suggest that the State of Vermont secede from the Federal Union! To be explicit, we advocate that Vermont set itself up as a Republic, independent and free from all other governing and social influences.”

Economics would be a problem, you say? Not at all. Passport fees would be collected from all those wishing to enter: $25 for a man, $.75 for everyone else. “Vermont would soon become a Utopia in fact as well as theory, to which a good admission would be charged. Possibly visas would be raised to $100.”

Granted, Vermont’s inland position might be constraining. Diplomatic negotiations would be undertaken with New Hampshire to secure a corridor from Brattleboro to the sea. Suppose New Hampshire objected? Easy: conquer it, and then annex it as a colony. Other states would clamor to join, but they would have to be kept out (Massachusetts and Connecticut excepted). “The Republic might, in such an event, achieve a new and more Nordic civilization.” (Dismiss that apparent whiff of 1920s nativism; a year later a poem by Orton honored the memories of Sacco and Vanzetti.)

In March, 1929, Coates’s magazine carried a full-fledged “Declaration of Independence for Vermont,” drawn up by a Committee of Public Safety, of which Orton, of course, was the chairman. That the Union to which Vermont had given its allegiance back in 1791 had failed to make good on its promises, was made evident by a litany of complaints. Washington had, among other things, ignored the Constitution, taken away the freedoms of speech, religion, and the press, imposed income and inheritance taxes, and passed the Volstead Act. The vote was no longer apportioned by population, and indeed was “denied to persons because of their colour,” while Prohibition was “destroying the moral, mental, and physical health of the people.”

But it was not just the federal government that Orton rejected. The enemy was nothing less than American Civilization itself, which “prostituted the Vermont people,” imposing on them the “unwholesome uniformity and deadly mediocrity of a machine age.” American Civilization devised wasteful economic plans, educational schemes that corrupted the youth, gave outsiders control of Vermont’s natural resources, and dispatched droves of tourists “of the most fleeting, transitory, and objectionable sort.”

The Babbitts were taking over, “forming [themselves] into strong bands they call Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions and so forth, whereby they may wreak an organized and collective destruction and sooner accomplish the ruin of Vermont.”

All very much tongue-in-cheek, of course. But behind it lay a larger concern, not just in Vermont, but in the nation as a whole, uncertain and often fearful of the changes taking place as industrialism spread, the cities grew, and immigration threatened the old pioneer stock (Vermont itself in these years saw both a revival of the Ku Klux Klan, and a eugenics program to sterilize those deemed unfit to breed).

Though back in 1929 his Committee had promised a constitution in a future issue of The Drift-Wind, it seems never to have appeared. Maybe by then Orton’s energies had been diverted by his work for the Vermont Commission on Country Life, the body of “progressive Vermonters’’ set up in 1928, whose Rural Vermont (1931) was perhaps the state’s first real effort at planning.

Orton himself remained a rock-ridden Republican, who would later denounce the Communist influence on historians seeking to question the myths of Vermont’s heroic origins. Did his ideas of independence die? Not entirely. In 1977, a year after the celebrations of the national bicentennial, he was one of the promoters of Vermont’s own...
“First, do no harm.” Hippocrates’ rule for physicians applies to secession movements as well. Secession ought to better the nation and not harm it. Otherwise, why undergo the danger and fatigue of changing one government for another? How will hearts be won to secession unless it improves lives?

The money we choose will affect everything else in our world. The monetary question boils down to this, whether our lives will be ruled by realities, or by abstractions. Real things, or illusions conjured up to defraud us. Real things and real values we freely choose for ourselves, or unreal abstracts forced on us by somebody else. If money must have value, then I have to go out and earn — accumulate — real wealth. If money is merely a symbol, then productive work is unnecessary. Whoever creates the symbols controls society, and the rest of us become their gulled slaves.

Symbol v. Substance: Reciprocity v. Hot Potato

When money has substance, perfect reciprocity rules every human exchange. Why? Because the market values substance for itself. Real people value that money for some real benefits conferred by its nature.

When I exchange using substance money, every transaction is complete and just, trading value for value. I give you a weight of silver or gold or tobacco or goats, and you give me a weight of lumber or milk or vegetables or cloth. Good for good, measure for measure.

Don’t miss this transaction’s essence: you and I exchange real things. Value for value. Reality for reality.

When I exchange money as symbol, a transaction is ever complete, or equitable. It is never complete because the symbolic money does not pay anyone. It delivers nothing of substance, it merely transfers a promise to pay to the next person who ends up with the symbol. Symbolic money creates a never-ending game of hot potato.

Using symbolic money, no transaction is ever equitable, either, because one party receives something of substance (some valuable real thing) while the other receives only a symbol. That symbol represents — nothing! Whether the symbol represents only debt (the negation of value), or whether it represents only confidence (the willingness of the next victim to take it), the symbol itself has no value.

A Tool of Love or Power

There is no other system or theory of money besides these two. Money either exchanges substance for substance, or substance for symbol. Money is either a tool of mutual enrichment and love, or a tool of exploitation & power. By “love” I mean not sentimental affection, but the justice of the Golden Rule. As Andrew Lytle observed, “The opposite of love is not hate, but power.”

These two monetary systems are utterly incompatible. Where they exist side by side, one will always drive out the other, just as bad money armed with government force always drives good money out of circulation. Only one monetary system is compatible with freedom, and that is substance. Only one system can protect and maintain property rights, and that is substance. A symbolic money system will eventually transfer title to all property to whoever creates the symbols.

Think about it: it must end that way.

On one side are people who can only get money by working for it, while on the other are those who create it out of thin air. At what point will the “creators” decide they have created “enough” money?

Answer: when they have created enough money to own everything.

PART I - National Monetary Secession

Nowhere can change do greater harm than in the monetary system. As the economy’s lifeblood, any faulty reform to money threatens to poison the whole economy. Money is also the chokepoint where corporations (“Big Business”) control our personal and political lives.

Can we free ourselves from their monetary control? If so, at the same time we free ourselves from their economic and political control.

But how do we start?

An Olde English Lesson

Like him or not, Henry VIII offers secessionists a canny lesson. When he broke up the great monasteries, he divided their holdings among his loyal followers, begetting in them a strong interest for perpetuating the new order. In a similar but less Machiavellian way, secession’s monetary reform ought to promise, and actually deliver, such improvement in lives that people want to support it.

Monetary reform can do much more for secession: it can revive local economies, stimulate local cash flow, and create today the communities that will become the nation tomorrow. Monetary secession doesn’t need to wait for national movements or congresses or legislatures or treaties or wars, because monetary secession begins now. It begins now, it attaches hearts and minds to secession now as individuals successfully take back control of their lives.

Monetary secession is national secession quickening and kicking in the womb.

Regaining Control

The present U.S. imperial economic system strips individuals and communities of control over their own fates. More accurately, this system strip-mines the economies and souls of individuals and communities, leaving ugly, empty pits in its path.

Who can unravel all the twisted history of corporate maneuvering to control the U.S. economy and monetary system through a central bank – Hamilton, the Bank of North America, the First & Second Banks of the United States, the embryonic victory under Lincoln, and the final victory with the Federal Reserve?

In the end, the U.S. Congress gave a private corporation (the Federal Reserve) the monopoly privilege to create money out of thin air. Worse yet, Congress gave the Fed power to force us cattle to accept their worthless script.

Before the Fed, the nation had a self-regulating bimetallic system, based on the independent market values of gold and silver. Since the Fed the nation has been forced into monetary dependency.

The Solution

Without monetary independence, the new nation can never declare political independence. It must have money with independent value—indeed, that is, of secret con-
Sands continued from previous page
ternational bank agreements manipulating exchange rates, and free of central bank/commercial bank cartel inflation. Among the many alternatives – goats, beans, wampum, giant stone wheels – gold and silver offer the best choice with the longest and most reliable pedigree.

Monetary reform should both prepare the way for secession and solidify support for it once gained. The goals of a monetary secession are to:

- Replace foreign money with local secession money;
- Revive local economies with silver and gold circulating locally, encouraging local purchases, and boosting local cash flow;
- Provide a prosperity-breeding money that wedds citizens to the new money and secession;
- Establish an alternative money already in use when secession comes, and so ease transition to economic independence;
- Decentralise and protect money supply and wealth, dispersing them as widely as possible among people;
- Provide a money independent of the United States empire and every other nation.

PART II - Personal Monetary Secession

Personal monetary secession means that we must stop thinking of money, and start thinking of wealth. After coinage appeared about 650 B.C., economic focus shifted drastically from building wealth (land, cattle, ships, productive enterprises) to piling up money. This shift from reality (wealth) to abstraction (money) nearly ruined the Greeks.

A first step to personal monetary secession is to stop thinking of ‘wealth’ as abstractions like financial assets, stocks, bonds, dollars, and start thinking about wealth as ‘productive assets,” like businesses and farms, that can produce and keep on producing without constantly feeding them more and more expensive inputs.

Personal monetary secession must proceed as a community in the local economy. We cannot save ourselves by hoarding silver and gold, because every economy is a network of individuals and transactions. By ourselves, we can’t create an economy, only a hermitage. Unless we rebuild local economies first, we can’t rebuild anything else.

Our motivation here must be love, not mere sentiment or affection, but the determination to do justice by every man. Part of loving our neighbour is helping him succeed, creating and keeping an environment where we can prosper together.

Finally, whatever replaces the present monetary system must work. It must make us more prosperous, not less. We can’t impose something on ourselves and others for blind ideological reasons. Rather, any change must be a change for the better.

Using Gold and Silver as Money

There are numerous “community currency” ideas, old and new. They may be good or bad, workable or not, but they are all variations of the symbolic (versus “substance-based”) money theory. It is recommendation enough that gold and silver money have worked for 4,500 years of recorded history.

Money must serve three functions: store of value, standard of value, and medium of exchange. Presently, silver and gold perform the first function very well, but politics keeps them from performing the other two. Both are essential to monetary freedom.

### Numeraire

A money serving all these functions is our numeraire, the money we think in terms of as our common denominator. The English think in pounds, Americans think in dollars.

We must replace our numeraire, using silver and gold instead of the US dollar. Let them become our standard of value and soon they’ll become our medium of exchange.

### Standard of Value

A standard of value tells us what something is worth in terms of that measure. We must begin to think in terms of ounces, and not “dollars.”

The table shows what an acre of rural Tennessee land cost in 1999 and 2006. Thinking in US dollars, the price of land has nearly doubled, but not in silver.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRICE OF AN ACRE OF LAND IN TENNESSEE</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dollars</td>
<td>$750.00</td>
<td>$1,367.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silver</td>
<td>150.80</td>
<td>105.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gold</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>2.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Land’s price has not risen in gold, either. At end-May 1999 an acre cost 2.774 gold ounces. By end-May, 2006, the U.S. dollar price of that land had nearly doubled, but the gold price had dropped 25 percent, to only 2.08 ounces.

### Mediums of Exchange

Our project to free ourselves seems stumped by the “medium of exchange” function. Why? Because by political manipulation silver and gold have been de-monetized. I can’t take my 100-ounce silver bar or gold coin down to the grocery store and buy bread with it directly. First, I have to find somebody willing to exchange it for U.S. dollars, then take dollars to the grocery store to buy bread. The inconvenience alone keeps me from using silver and gold as money, and it was intended that way.

But what if citizens in a local economy began to accept silver and gold among themselves, every day, as they buy and sell to each other? Here is the key to your shackles: you free yourself, and deny the Empire use of your wealth, when you deal in gold and silver coin directly.

This is the great secret of the U.S. system about all our “stolen” rights. They aren’t really stolen: we are fooled into renouncing them voluntarily.

Beyond all quibble, we all have a common law, constitutional, and statutory right to gold and silver money. In fact, the notes of the federal reserve bank, or any other bank, are not “money” under current law: they are “notes.” A “note” is not money but an obligation to pay money. They may be “legal tender,” but they are not money.

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But wait! Aren’t we legally forced to accept “legal tender”?
Not at all. That’s the catch. You can avoid the legal tender system by specifying beforehand what form of payment you will accept. Legal tender only operates by default, absent any other specification. You are free to contract for specific payment in any form, provided you make that known by contract or public announcement.

What stands in the way of your monetary freedom? Two things: ignorance, and laziness. Ignorance, because you don’t know how to use silver and gold as money, and laziness because it’s easier to use paper money or credit cards. I may be able to help you with the ignorance, but the laziness you’re going to have to take care of yourself.

Practicalities
How do you start using silver and gold every day?
All you must do is overcome a simple exchange rate problem. Because the U.S. enjoys a huge internal market, few Americans ever deal with foreign currencies. But citizens all over the world living near national borders deal in diverse currencies daily. Even in Vermont if they can do it, you can do it.

For life’s larger transactions, you can use GoldMoney.com. You actually own gold through a Channel Islands company that stores your gold outside the U.S. You can transfer ownership to any other GoldMoney account holder instantaneously over the Internet.

For most daily transactions, you’ll be using silver. Today an ounce of silver brings about US$12.00. Ten silver dimes, which contain nearly three-quarters of an ounce, cost about US$8.75, so one is worth US$0.875. The smallest generally available gold coin, a 1/10 ounce, costs about US$68.

How can you learn what these coins are worth today?
Go to www.kitco.com and look up spot gold and silver prices. Or visit my website, www.the-moneychanger.com, scroll down the home page to the yellow banner that says, “Download Free Portfolio Calculator,” double click on that, and fill out the pop-up form. That will automatically add you to the list to receive my free daily e-mail commentary, which includes the prices of dozens of items and spot gold and silver.

Once you know the spot silver or gold price, and the metal content of any coin, simply multiply content by spot price to calculate the U.S. dollar value.

To make life even easier, Catherine Austin Fitts of Solari.com and I have put together a website, www.silverandgoldaremoney.com. Go there and enter the current spot gold and silver prices and the amount you want to pay in dollars, hit the update button, and it will immediately tell you how much silver, or silver and gold, you need to pay that dollar amount.

Before long, you won’t even need that website calculator. At first you’ll be making those calculations in your head, then you’ll stop thinking in U.S. dollars altogether and begin thinking in silver and gold.

Then you and your neighbours can keep your wealth at home and circulating in your own local economy, blessing and enriching one another.

From there, political secession is the natural next step.

As an Ameriprise financial advisor, I believe success should be measured not just by your financial well-being, but by how confident you feel about your future. My mission is to help you reach your financial goals through a personal relationship based on personalized, knowledgeable advice. This focus is designed to help you reach your goals, giving you greater peace of mind.

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Areas of Focus

Qualifications
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Series 7 License; Series 63 License; Series 65 License
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CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER practitioner, 2003

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equally important bicentennial. Some twenty years earlier, in fact, he had driven to New York in a car proudly flying a green silk flag emblazoned with the term REPUBLIC OF VERMONT, though he imagined no one in Manhattan would either notice or understand it.

"We drew up in front of the hotel, the REPUBLIC OF VERMONT flag whipping smartly in the wind.

"As we stopped the car, out rushed the doorman, arrayed in all the trappings of an admiral's rank.

"He opened the door and very politely said:

"May I be of assistance, Mr. Ambassador?"
It’s hard to imagine a mid-term election ever attracting as much national media hype as did the 2006 election. Not only was Mr. Bush’s military strategy soundly rejected, but the Democrats took control of both the U.S. House and the Senate, and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld resigned.

So elated by the news that Nancy Pelosi would be the new Speaker of the House, one of my former Duke University colleagues wrote to me that, the morning after the election, she “burst into uncontrollable tears, not realizing how deeply grateful I feel that the American public actually seems to be coming to its senses.”

She then added, “It indicates a real revolution in this country.”

But is this really so?

“The upshot for me,” she continued in her letter, “is a strong feeling of hope and re-connection to my countrymen and women. While I might have been inclined to join your secession movement before the election, I am now absolutely committed to the national process, and long for the day when Barack Obama is president.”

But will the 2006 mid-term elections make any difference whatsoever?

Or were they simply much ado about nothing?

The problem is that the U.S. Congress is still owned, operated and controlled by multinational corporations that care little about the health and wellbeing of the American people, beyond the average U.S. consumer’s inequalities, but hedges on income tax reform and immigration.

The Democrats as a party, meanwhile, are clueless as to how to deal with a whole range of pressing national issues: the moribund Social Security system, the ballooning federal deficit, the kapat health care system, the staggering trade deficit, the imploding pension system, or the cheap-oil endgame.

While some Democrats do appear to be committed to ending the war in Iraq, their strategy for doing so is vague and unclear. Not unlike that of the Republicans, D.C.-based Democratic support for the state of Israel is unconditional and knows no limits. The plight of the Palestinians, meanwhile, is fundamentally irrelevant. As for Iran, the Democrats march in lockstep with the Israeli lobby, which portray Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as the Great Satan. Nancy Pelosi is no exception to the rule.

Although the Democrats’ take on the underlying causes of terrorism is not quite as simplistic as George W. Bush’s – “they hate our freedoms” – they have shown little inclination to delve very deeply into “terrorism’s” root causes, which include the U.S. government’s decades-long support for Israel, U.S. intelligence’s sponsoring of so-called “freedom fighters” and “false flag” operations around the globe, the ongoing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the U.S. military/industrial complex’s attempts to establish hegemonic control of Middle Eastern oil. They also have shown no inclination to challenge the tortured conclusions of the 9/11 Commission Report.

And, like the Republicans, the Democrats have no geopolitical strategy for solving either the global Peak Oil or climate change problems. Their approach to oil dilemmas extends no further than writing blank checks so the executive branch can continue spending of $1 billion a week fighting wars overseas.

In the wake of the much-hyped 2006 elections, then, a few inescapable facts remain. First, our national government has lost its moral authority, and our nation is unsustainable.

Indefatigable ability to spend beyond his means. Congress itself, as new Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders admits over and over again, is corrupt to the core. We have a single political party – the Republican Party – disguised as a two-party system. It makes not one iota of difference which of the two major political parties is in power.

The results are and will continue to be the same. Take Congressman John P. Murtha, for example, who was Pelosi’s choice for House Majority Leader. Praised by mainstream liberals for his opposition to the war in Iraq, Murtha is one of the sleaziest members of the House, best known for his cozy and intimate relationship with big defense contractors. (Don’t take my word for it – simply google “Abscam.”)

And then there is the articulate and charismatic Barack Obama, a Harvard Law School graduate and the rising star of the Democratic Party. Although not a political ideologue, Obama embraces many of the same positions as former president Bill Clinton. He is pro-military, pro-globalization, pro-tort reform, and pro-corporate. A political pragmatist, Obama decries income inequalities, but hedges on income tax reform and immigration.

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It’s time to put aside Red and Blue and start acting Green.

Be it resolved that the state of Vermont peacefully and democratically free itself from the United States of America and return to its natural status as an independent republic as it was between January 15, 1777 and March 4, 1791.

Join Our “Free Vermont 200 Towns by 2012” Town Meeting Campaign!
Help us call on the VT legislature to convene a special session to debate this resolution.

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Afghanistan and Iraq Wars: $500 billion+
On this page, the Middlebury Institute will present some interesting thoughts and theories of secession by other secessionist organizations in North America. We begin by offering the initial “Secession Primer” of the American Secessionist Project, which has an excellent website [www.secessionist.us] listing arguments for secession, papers on secession, and links to 17 other secessionist groups (including the Second Vermont Republic). Read more at middleburyinstitute.net

The American Secession Project

Dedicated to placing secession in the mainstream of political thought as a viable solution to contemporary problems.

“Secession.”

That one word evokes many emotions and concepts. To many in the United States it equates to treason and rebellion. This sad fact is a result of ignorance. If a man has the right to vote but is always told that voting is pointless, or worse illegal, and he believes such to be the truth, it cannot be said that he truly has such a right.

It has not always been so. The United States was born during a time that secession and self-determination were not only observed as inalienable rights, but were practiced. Virginia set the example in June of 1776 by declaring her independence from Great Britain. She, along with the 12 other colonies, jointly declared their independence the following month.

These were acts of secession, and our Independence Day might rightly be called Secession Day.

The charter of the American Secession Project is simple. We desire to place the concept of secession in the mainstream of political thought. Our intent is to proclaim that secession is a viable and legal right and a practical solution to contemporary problems.

Secondly, we desire to build a coalition of groups seeking autonomy and independence within the current United States. Mutual support for the concept of self-determination and secession will eventually benefit all groups seeking freedom.

Secessionists come in all ethnic and cultural backgrounds, colors, and religious persuasions. Secession is neither liberal nor conservative; it is a right that might be equally applied regardless of a group’s persuasion. The folks that support a free California and an Independent Alaska certainly disagree on numerous issues, specifically environmental issues. However, the concept of supporting another in their bid to manage their own affairs is certainly a historic American (if not 20th-century American) point of view.

As such, the project has and will attempt to represent each separatist, independence, and secessionist group fairly and objectively. Our purpose is to establish that self-determination is a basic right, and support all groups seeking self-determination and independence.

We invite input from any and all groups seeking self-determination and autonomy. The sections of this site dedicated to particular movements are open to input from group leaders and members. We want to show what you are really about. Please e-mail us with information and to inform us about inaccuracies.

From the SECESSION PRIMER:

Secession in the United States is a much-maligned and misunderstood right. However, ignorance and hatred of the concept in no way diminish its status as a right. Our very Declaration of Independence is a secessionist document. We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; and that among these, are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute a new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, to effect their safety and happiness.

The right of secession in the U.S. goes to the very heart of how and who formed the United States. John C. Calhoun, in his work “Discourse on The Constitution and Government of the United States,” lays out the argument that:

1) The United States is a federal, not national government. It is a government representing a collective of states, each of which retains its own sovereignty.
2) The People established their respective states; the states established the federal government.
3) The United States government and the various states have a contractual arrangement (a “compact,” to use Calhoun’s word); when either violates the contract it can be nullified or terminated.

Many libertarians take a more overarching view of sovereignty. They may recognize the legitimacy of governments at the state level but ultimately they feel that sovereignty resides with the individual. Milder forms of libertarianism are not incongruent with Calhoun’s theories. More radical libertarian viewpoints hold that each generation must renew the contract, and individuals can withhold consent collectively or individually at any time.