Keep It In Vermont!
How A $150-Million Federal Windfall Might “Stimulate” the Vermont Economy
Robin McDermott and Rob Williams

Just a day before Valentine’s Day, the current occupant of the White House demonstrated his love for United States citizen/consumers by signing the so-called “Economic Stimulus Act of 2008” into law. Sitting behind a small desk with a banner that shouted “Boosting Our Economy,” he inked a $107-million spending package that will send (any week now) tax “rebate” checks ranging between $300 and $1,200 to middle- and low-income taxpayers (which is to say, most of us). Joining in the photo-op were Congressional Democratic leaders Nancy Pelosi and crew, all beaming to celebrate this brilliant “booster shot” that will supposedly inoculate the United States economy against the virulent “R” word (shhhh...“recession”).

Except that this $107-million “stimulus” plan is nothing more than a “band-aid” (read “short-sighted”) solution to a much more systemic global economic dilemma, and anyone awake and paying attention understands that it will do next to nothing to stimulate anything, let alone help stabilize our ailing national economy.

On behalf of Vermont Commons, editor Rob Williams urges citizens of the once and future republic to re-invest their federal rebate checks in the Vermont economy these next two months. Celebrate the local multiplier effect of the U.S. dollar here in Vermont and jump-start our local living economies.
Editorial

Time to Cast Off and Dream Anew

In her letter to the editor in this issue of Vermont Commons, Lisa Nash makes a number of sensible arguments regarding Vermonters and Americans, Vermont and empire, and the general readiness of Vermonters to embrace their own independence. In particular I was struck by Ms Nash’s assertion that “Vermonters, like most Americans, are far from coming to terms with the reality that the U.S. is an empire.” The UVM Center for Rural Studies just ran its annual Vermont Poll a week before the March 4 primaries, when the hopeful gaze of Vermonters was fixed on the U.S. presidential candidates. The poll asked, had the U.S. government lost its moral authority (77 percent, yes); was the U.S. government unsustainable (49 percent, yes); un governable (almost 13 percent, yes); unfixable (more than 6 percent, yes). What do these numbers tell us? They indicate most Vermonters, like most Americans, are dismayed by America’s loss of moral integrity and standing. While this is true for three out of four of us, only one of every two of us believes the federal government is unsustainable (politically and otherwise). And only a bit better than one in ten of us believes the government cannot govern, regardless, while a very small 6.4 percent believe it is, in the end, unfixable.

In other words, Ms Nash is right. Vermonters still believe in America, if not in the captains currently steering the ship of state. All but 11.5 percent of them are not ready for secession — according to the same 2008 Vermont Poll. The real core of any empire is non-material: neither military, economic, or technological, but cultural, moral, and spiritual. It is foolish to pretend America does not still have, however languidly, such a core. It still does, or rather its citizens do. And if it did not, secessionism would be a rampant political movement here. An empire’s non-material core is its vital life force, its animating principle, the basis by which it endures and rallies peoples and whole countries to its side. The U.S. attracts an unending stream of millions to its shores, constantly swelling its already burdensome population of more than 300 million. Whole nations themselves — from Estonia to Macedonia to Azerbaijan — beg to be admitted to America’s European military and economic shelters, NATO and the EU. America is still the beating heart of the West. It is what has made the world continue to cohere — even as we enter the waning hours of the Petroleum Age. As William Rivers Pitt has written: “No other nation on ... earth uses the words ‘Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness’ as the premise for their foundation in government.” Those are not “mere words,” but the living engines that churn a million hearts and mobilize multitudinous minds to struggle to realize the global promise of what we Americans, ever since the Great Depression, have called The American Dream.

But, as so many writers have observed, and not just recently but for a long time, there is a dark side, running all the way from the English settlers’ very first encounters with their territorial hosts, the indigenous Indians, to the fatal agreement the Founding Fathers made to postpone the issue of slavery for a generation and get on with the business of making a nation, to the forcible acquisition of half of Mexico, to the final extermination of all the continent’s Indian cultures, to the conquest of the Philippines across the Pacific Ocean and the illegal usurpation of the kingdom of Hawaii, to the genocidal wars in Indochina and now Iraq and Afghanistan.

As the hard-headed enthusiast for empire Zbigniew Brzezinski has wryly observed in The Grand Chessboard: “Democratization is inimical to imperial mobilization.” A nation that seizes the mandate for empire surrenders its status as a democratic republic. This tension — between the exigencies of empire and those of a democratic republic — was tolerated with varying degrees of success for almost 50 years, until the Cold War ended. America, first under the leadership of Bush I and Clinton I and then impelled by the imperial mandate of the Project for a New American Century under Bush II, unequivocally opted to maintain “imperial mobilization.” The U.S. conduct of its wars in Iraq and Afghanistan will not only cost us a currently estimated $4 trillion to $5 trillion (Stiglitz & Bilmes) that we Americans do not have, but, as well, our moral standing in the world. That latter cost cannot be quantified. On the order of 4 million souls have been displaced in Iraq and 1.2 million Iraqi lives ended. It is a grievous fact we Americans tend not to notice or count these losses of the “the other,” and focus obsessively on our own. But even our own losses far exceed those of the 9/11 “new Pearl Harbor,” with more than 4,000 American dead, 30,000 grotesquely wounded, and untold tens of thousands psychologically scarred for life. For what end?

Thus the American Dream lies in tatters. It is not only the recommitment of the nation’s increasingly scarce resources to war-making and endless violence, but much else besides that is sinking the titanic ship of empire.

Of course there are many millions of Americans who hope to reverse, in 2009, the moral damage done to their country in the past five years. They do not understand the immense blood-soaked “obligations” we have built up that will keep us in Iraq and Afghanistan for as long as there’s still recoverable oil in the great basins of the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea. Neither Hillary nor Barack will alter these obligations, made for the sake of the entire West’s “American Way of Life.” continued on page 15

Contributors
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Jeff Bickart lives with his family in Craftsbury, and teaches fiber arts, botany, ornithology, and organic crop production at Sterling College. He may be reached at jbickart@sterlingcollege.edu, where you can obtain references on the textile arts as well as (free) seeds for Japanese indigo and woad.

Len Emery (www.limageair.biz) is a fine art and aerial photographer working in Springfield, Vermont.

Sarah Grillo is a cartoonist and writer living in Burlington.

‘The Greenneck’ lives and writes in the rusted-out shell of a one-ton Chevy pickup somewhere in Cabot.

Jim Hogue operates a small farm and performs as Ethan Allen. He is a member of Vermonters for Voting Integrity, which wrote the bill banning electronic voting in Vermont.

Robin McDermott is a co-founder of the Mad River Valley Localvore Project. She and her husband, Ray, operate their business, QualityTrainingPortal, from their home in Waitsfield, where they also grow much of their own food.

Ron Miller is on the editorial board of Vermont Commons. He has written several books on progressive and alternative education and is currently editor of Education Revolution magazine. He has taught at Goddard, St. Michael’s and Champlain colleges and established the Bellwether School in Williston.

Brian Mohr and his wife, Emily Johnson, photograph nearly anything that catches their eye for editorial, commercial, special-event and fine-art clients in Vermont and worldwide. You can view more of their work at www.emberphoto.com.

Thomas Naylor, economist, businessman, and author, is co-founder of the Second Vermont Republic.

Kirkpatrick Sale, editor-at-large and author of a dozen books, including After Eden: Evolution of Human Domination (Duke), is the director of the Middlebury Institute.

Rob Williams is a teacher, historian, writer, and musician, and is associate publisher and (web) editor of Vermont Commons. He lives in Waitsfield.
Letter to the Editor

PREPARING THE GROUND FOR SECESSION

Editor, Vermont Commons:

Thanks for creating the Vermont Commons. It is one of the most stimulating and lucid publications I’ve read in a long time. In an age of declining literacy, it is such a pleasure to encounter good writing – as well as good ideas – in a newspaper!

I am fully in support of Vermont secession, so I was interested to learn of FreeVermont's campaign to introduce resolutions in favor of secession onto Town Meeting agendas in 2009. While I initially reacted with excitement, as I considered this strategy further I came to feel we have not yet laid a strong foundation for this kind of action. I feel concerned that acting too precipitously could harm, rather than advance, our interests.

It seems to me that we are—and should be—some distance from a genuine secession attempt, for at least two reasons. First, I believe that a secession onto Town Meeting agendas in 2009! While I initially reacted with excitement, as I considered this strategy further I came to feel we have not yet laid a strong foundation for this kind of action. I feel concerned that acting too precipitously could harm, rather than advance, our interests.

It seems to me that we are—and should be—some distance from a genuine secession attempt, for at least two reasons. First, I believe that a secession attempt by Vermont while the Empire is still strong would simply result in our being crushed, rather than advance, our interests.

On top of their understandable resistance to the reality of empire, I observe that Vermonters are inordinately attached to an ethic of politeness and “commonsense” in politics; they tend to dislike anything that seems extreme, and to always seek “balance” in public discourse. Because Vermont politics are relatively polite and reasonable, compared with politics in other parts of the U.S., many Vermonters feel like this innately moderate approach works. Secession is not likely to seem very moderate by Town Meeting Day of 2009! Even Vermonters who are outside of the moderate center are apt – like most Americans – to be reformers rather than radicals. And secession is radical – it is seeking to address theills of our situation at the root.

I feel a great sense of urgency about moving in the direction of an independent Vermont. But the more urgency there is, the more important it is to be skilled. If we are not skilled, if we don’t prepare the ground adequately for change, the seeds of a second Vermont republic are unlikely to sprout or flourish. And that would be a shame, because when our empire collapses, we could face a scenario similar to or worse than the one the former Soviet Union faced in the 1990s. People will be left scrambling, bewildered by what is happening and unprepared to respond in any humane way. As we saw in the Soviet Union, there are always those who are prepared to exploit such situations for their own profit, and if there is no functional alternative, they will win the day.

So questions of strategy are critical. What do we need to do to prepare Vermonters to really hear what we have to say – emotionally, not just intellectually? The Commons is great, but how many people will actually read it? Probably only those already strongly tilted in our direction. How do we reach the others? Is a Town Meeting campaign really the best way to begin? What additional or alternative actions might we take?

Not wanting to be one of those people who criticize without making suggestions, here are some of my ideas. First, I think it would be helpful to create regional/local affinity groups of people already in favor of secession. Perhaps it would make sense to begin the process of forming affinity groups at an initial statewide meeting for those interested in secession. Affinity groups could read pertinent materials (like the books and articles on the Commons website) and meet to discuss what they are reading and thinking.

Second, organizations already working for secession in Vermont could promote a speaker's bureau/workshop leaders group. Speakers/leaders could be drawn from the regional affinity groups and could attend trainings with others from around the state. I envision these folks doing everything from process work (i.e., an adapted version of Joanna Macy/John Seed's Council of All Beings), to training in nonviolent communication, to practicing public speaking and responding to questions from groups. I would want these folks to have a really solid grounding not only in facts and ideas, but also in staying rooted in their hearts and centered in the face of difficult, confrontational people.

Once these leaders/speakers were trained they could lead workshops for the wider secessionist constituency, as well as reach out to educate other Vermonters about the reality of empire and the... continued on page 11
Anthony Pollina of Middlesex is the Progressive candidate for governor of Vermont. This is the first in a series of interviews with Vermont’s 2008 gubernatorial candidates.

Vermont Commons: Let’s start with a very broad question. As you’re considering becoming governor of Vermont, what is your vision for our future? What direction would you like to see our state take?

Anthony Pollina: First of all, I would like Vermonters to reconnect with the fact that we share a vision. I really believe that we share priorities. I remember when Vermont was a real leader on important issues, from the environment to health care to issues of war and peace. When we talk about my vision for Vermont, the first thing I want to do is remind Vermonters of our ability to be leaders and our ability to work together, and help us reconnect with a vision of a Vermont that takes better care of itself. Part of it is looking for ways to invest in Vermont, build upon the good things that we have here.

If you listen to Jim Douglas long enough, you begin to think that Vermont is a bad place. Nobody wants to do business here; it’s too expensive; our kids don’t want to stay here; we can’t fix the roads, we can’t invest in energy efficiency. Essentially, Douglas puts forth a negative vision and talks about the things that we cannot do. Jim Douglas lives in a different Vermont than I do. I have a very different vision of Vermont. I think Vermont is a great place, filled with a lot of great people who have a lot of great energy. Quality of life, environment, great place to raise kids, one of the smartest states, we have a great workforce. So I think we need to recognize that Vermont has things that not every place has. We need to find a way to build upon those great things.

From an economic point of view, I think we need to do a lot more to invest in Vermont and build upon the business possibilities that we have. In the Vermont that I live in, we would be buying local. The governor goes on the radio and says we should all buy local; it’s just that simple. When I hear that I say to myself “Jim, if it’s so simple, why are we not doing it? Why is it when I walk into a college or a prison in Vermont they’re still serving cheese from Wisconsin and hamburger from Iowa?” I think we can do a lot more to invest in Vermont by buying local. I think we could bring Vermonters together to insure ourselves locally, using a self-insurance pool that we’re all a part of, that we all pay into, based on our ability to pay. It wouldn’t be tied to whether we’re working.

Douglas told us we couldn’t afford to buy the dams on the Connecticut River. Now those dams are worth twice as much as they were, they’re owned by a Canadian company, and the power’s going to Massachusetts.

VC: Do you mean health insurance, particularly?

AP: Yes. I think Vermonters are willing to come together and do that. I think that we could build upon some of the business base that we have here in terms of building renewable energy businesses and IT and internet technology businesses. Six years or so ago, when Vermont Yankee was being sold, a couple of us suggested that some of the windfall profit from the sale be set aside into a fund to build renewable energy businesses in this state, to build a renewable energy institute affiliated with our state colleges. At the time, no one in state government wanted to make it happen. I think we could build an equity fund to support local Vermont businesses by asking institutions like UVM or Fletcher Allen to invest their portfolios locally. We ask them not to invest in tobacco or South Africa; if we have the right governor we can ask them to invest in Vermont. We could ask them to put two percent of their portfolio into a fund which would then be used to provide equity to entrepreneurs and small businesses. Once they did that, we could go to bigger businesses and ask them to do the same.

When it comes to economic development I want renewable energy and high-tech businesses but also meat processing plants as well. I want us to understand that those are both the kinds of things that can really grow and thrive in Vermont. And I want us all to carry a Vermont credit card that we operate and control. We could control the interest rates, and the fees that businesses pay when they used the card, we could keep that money in Vermont and use a share of it for the equity fund. There are a number of things we could do to better weather the rash of globalization that we’re going through right now. Jim Douglas talks about affordability. But it’s not just about Vermont, it’s a national problem. We should realize that there are things that we can do in Vermont that are different if we are willing to look inward and invest more in what we really have.

VC: When you say “weather” the uncertainties of globalization, it sounds as if, in some ways, you’d like to see us disengage a little bit from the system.

AP: I’d certainly like us to survive. I think globalization is battering us economically. Even under Jim Douglas, in the last six years we’ve lost about 25 percent of our manufacturing jobs. The whole issue around globalization and the race to the bottom, and this idea that American farmers and American workers are going to compete with farmers and workers in China and India, basically just means that we’re going to drive ourselves down and we’re going to continue to lower the standard of living. So I would like us, as much as possible, to disengage from the global system. Trade is something you’re always going to do; you’re not going to avoid it. But I think that free trade agreements were a big mistake, and Vermont, like a lot of other states, is suffering from them. But we are smart enough to find ways to disengage from that and look for creative ways to build our economy.

VC: Talk a little about the Vermont Milk Company, because that seems to be an excellent example of the kind of local enterprise that you’d like to support.

AP: The way it came about is interesting because it’s a business enterprise that came out of a grassroots organizing effort. Farmers came to me and others to ask for help. They originally wanted to form a union so that they could negotiate and regain more control over their milk, and over the profit that it generates. They traveled around the state and talked with a lot of farmers and did actually negotiate with the milk handlers, but that didn’t get anywhere. That led to the creation of the business. It adds value to their milk; the Vermont name adds value to everything from teddy bears to coffee and maple syrup, so why not milk, which is the basic Vermont commodity? The way the dairy industry works now, Vermont milk is mixed with milk from other states, trucked long distances and sold as a cheap commodity. They’re hoping to take as much milk as possible out of that commodity market, keep it here in Vermont, and put that value back into the pockets of farmers. It’s Vermont-owned; the board is controlled by farmers. It’s a fair trade dairy business. Fair trade is really growing on the international level; why not bring that concept closer to home? We pay the farmers a steady price for their milk, the company, not the farmer, pays to truck the milk to the plant, then we make ice cream, cheese, and
Keep It In Vermont, continued from page 1

Even the imperial pundits, prophets, and powers-that-be are honest about this. “There is no evidence that [rebates] have meaningfully stimulated either consumption or growth,” observed former Reagan/Bush I official Bruce Bartlett in a March 24 New York Times op-ed piece entitled “Stop Those Checks.” “By and large,” he concluded, “people saved the money they received or paid bills (which is the same thing); very few used their rebates to increase spending.”

Bartlett’s solution of one month ago, now but a faint whiff of a suggestion archived in the electronic ether, called on Congress to rescind the “stimulus” legislation (yeah, right) and create a “mortgage Superfund site” to clean up what he called the “toxic waste” of our financial crisis.

And Holsteins can fly, right?

We’ve got another idea. The idea behind www.KeepItInVermont.org is to create a space for Vermonters to swap stories about how we can put our “rebate” checks to work supporting our neighbors, farmers, businesses, and not-for-profits right here at the Green Mountains. At the website, Vermont citizens can make an anonymous pledge indicating how they will spend their “rebate” money in-state, boosting our economy and enabling us to track how much rebate money Vermonters have kept here at home.

Let’s begin with a healthy dose of realism. Between the two of us, we know very few citizens in Vermont who aren’t struggling to make ends meet. Most folks we know work two, three, or four jobs to cover the costs incurred by rising fuel prices, a falling dollar, a “war on terror” that will not end in our lifetimes (or so we are told), and the increasing cost of health care and other basic social services. Most of us here in Vermont need more money to pay our bills, put food on the table, and to save for our kids’ education.

But let’s be honest. All of the above investments are NOT what the U.S. government’s economic stimulus checks are supposed to be used for. If Vermonters do with our “rebate” checks what the U.S. government and Fortune 500 corporations want us to do (and let’s not forget that they spend somewhere between a trillion and two trillion tax-free dollars every year on slick marketing propaga-ganda reminding us of our proper role), we will purchase a new computer, or a TV from a big box store headquartered on the other side of the country, or a (insert product X here).

Whoaoh! That giant sucking sound is our “found” rebate check money leaving Vermont.

On the other hand, if we Vermonters re-invest our windfall of “found” money in our local economies, we can do some good work. Much has been written about the “multiplier effect” of our dollars spent locally: if we take our money to our local farmers, and they spend that money at local stores, which in turn pay local employees, who spend some money on a nice dinner at local restaurants, whose chefs pay local farmers for the food served in the restaurants…

You get the idea. Invest locally, keep our dollars in state, and “stimulate” our neighbors. Each of us can choose to re-invest our “found” money in myriad ways that stimulate our communities, and we’ve got a whole bunch of ideas at the web site already — see www.KeepItInVermont.org.

Demographic data indicate that we have 250,000 tax-paying households in Vermont. Estimating conservatively, at $600 per rebate check per household, we could generate $150 million for our state if everyone made a thoughtful decision to reinvest their money in the Vermont economy. $150 million. Now that’s what you call a “stim ulus” package.

We could generate $150 million for our state if everyone made a thoughtful decision to reinvest their money in the Vermont economy.

Serious money

Let’s go one step further. What if, at the local level, Vermont neighborhoods or entire towns considered how best to re-invest our found “rebate” money, given the looming crises of Peak Oil, climate change, and other 21st century dilemmas we are just beginning to consider?

Considered collectively, our rebate checks total up to big chunk of change. A little math is helpful. The two of us live in a town with approximately 525 homesteads; estimating more optimism- istically now, the “rebate” checks at $1,000 per homestead ($600 for singles, $1,200 for married couples filing jointly, plus an additional $300 per child under 17), our rebate checks would total $525,000.

What could our town do with more than half a million dollars of “found” money?

Now, multiply that figure by 256 towns (our town is more or less of average size) — for a total of $128,000,000.

That’s $128 million dollars. (Exactly three times the amount of U.S. taxpayer money it cost the IRS to simply mail 130 million households their preliminary “your rebate checks will be coming soon” announcements last March.)

What could Vermonters do with between $128 million and $150 million?

We posed this question to some of our neighbors. Here are just a few ideas they generated off the top of their heads, beyond the obvious.

All of us have watched home heating oil prices spike these past few years. What if towns created firewood co-ops? Citizens might arrange to bring in a large quantity of local or regional logwood at wholesale rates to a central location, pay to cut/split/process it, and then transport the firewood to member homes, either in individual vehicles or through renting a biodiesel-fueled dump truck. Members get the wood for a significant discount over “retail split/delivered” costs, while fueling long-term demand for more firewood to transition us off of ever-more-expensive imported fossil fuel energy sources.

Or why not create an investment fund that offers zero-interest loans, education and supply-chain connections to enable our farmers to learn how to transition their horse-power away from oil-powered vehicles, and back to horses, ox (or yak) teams and human-power? Those Vermonters who have seen “The Power of Community” documentary understand what happened in Cuba – the only nation in the world (so far) to have “Peak Oil” suddenly thrust upon them – when the Soviet Union collapsed and Cubans suddenly lost access to their only supply line for cheap fossil fuel energy. Cuban agrit-researchers had alternative plans in place to assist farmers and citizens in making the transition to a more human-energy-intensive but ultimately more productive farm economy. We could start to do the same with our “found” money in our own communities, given the emerging reality of Peak Oil globally.

Or maybe start town or regional energy cooperatives to purchase solar panels, wind turbines, or...
FROM THE MIDDLEBURY INSTITUTE
If Kosovo, Why Not Vermont? — Dispatches from the Fronts Kirkpatrick Sale

By William J. Kole
Sean Connery thinks a Scottish nation is a bonnie notion. How about Spain’s Basque country becoming a real country? And what’s wrong with a People’s Republic of Vermont?
Kosovo’s looming independence raises all those questions and more. For starters: why is statehood okay for some people but frowned on for others? After all, isn’t the right to self-determination the essence of democracy itself?
There are at least two dozen secessionist movements active in Europe alone, and scores of others agitating for sovereignty around the globe. All of them, experts warn, will be emboldened by Sunday’s expected proclamation of the Republic of Kosovo.

2. BBC News, February 17, 2008
Kosovo’s parliament has unanimously endorsed a declaration of independence from Serbia, in a historic session.
Celebrations went on into the night after Prime Minister Hashim Thaci promised a democracy that respected the rights of all ethnic communities.
Serbia’s PM denounced the U.S. for helping create a “false state.”
Tens of thousand of people had thronged the streets of Kosovo’s capital, Pristina, since morning. When news came of the declaration, the center of the city erupted with fireworks, firecrackers, and celebratory gunfire.

3. Pristina, Kosovo, February 24, 2008,
New York Times
The Serbian police said they had arrested nearly 200 rioters involved in Thursday’s protests, in which demonstrators, outraged at American support for an independent Kosovo, stormed the U.S. Embassy in Belgrade and set part of it on fire.
The Serbian government has condemned the attacks. But Serbia’s minister for Kosovo, Slobodan Samardzic, blamed the United States. “The U.S. is the major culprit for all the troubles since Feb. 17,” Mr. Samardzic told the state news service.

To the Editor:
While paying lip service to the principle of national sovereignty, the United States and the European Union argue, in effect, for a “Kosovo exception” on the grounds that the ethnic Albanians in Kosovo have suffered historic oppression. But lots of ethnic groups can make exactly the same claim — the Basques, the Kurds, the Chechens. On what principled basis is the situation in Kosovo any different?
Supporters of an independent Kosovo don’t even bother to address this question, and it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that they are doing this simply because they can, Serbia being weak.
Quite obviously, they would not even think of proposing similar solutions in Russia or Spain....
Stanley A. Bowker

By Thomas Fleming
Secession, and the communities of scale that would result from secession movements, are the remedy, both in principle and in application, for many of the moral, social, and cultural problems engendered by Leviathan states around the globe.... Not all secession movements have laudable objectives or deserve support, however. Some secessionist nationalities – Kurds and Chechens, for example – threaten peace and have a long record of violence....
Throughout the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, the United States has played a major role in breaking up historic nations and unions, not on some idealistic principle of national self-determination but on the well-worn maxim of all empires, divide et impera; the intended result is to make them all...slaves on the vast plantation of transnational corporations.
If someone asks if you believe in secession, the proper answer is: It depends on who is seceding from whom and for what reasons in what manner.

Why is statehood okay for some people but frowned on for others?

Dr. Fleming makes a case, but that can be made, for selective support of secession movements, arguing that he is in favor of some, but “not all secession movements have laudable objectives or deserve support.”
But I don’t see how you can recognize the virtues of secession and then decide that those don’t apply to certain peoples you don’t like. It seems to me that the right to secession — made explicit in some cases, as in the Soviet Union and Canadian constitutions — admits of no exceptions, particularly since the right may be said to be something of a universal common law and is explicitly granted in the Montevideo Convention. That document, a spelling out of customary international law, declares that “the political existence of the state is independent of recognition by the other states” and furthermore that “a state has the right to organize itself as it sees fit” regardless of recognition. No picking and choosing.
Of course as an individual, one is free to support or not support any nation or movement, but that is entirely different from support of secession itself — a political tool of great importance that we must do our best to establish as legitimate wherever it arises, whether we like the Tajiks and Kosovars who use it. To demand that it must be a means “for arriving at worthy and honorable ends” is to make of it a religious, not a political, tool — and anyway, just who is to decide?
Besides, governments, I would argue, do not have the liberty to support or refuse support to entities that declare their statehood, at least on the moral and legal, as apart from the financial or political, level. That is obviously to the benefit of those parts of the United States that contemplate secession and would want to have — would need to have, I’d say — the support of other countries of the world in order to forestall impetuous action by a Washington administration little disposed to their depatures.

Kirkpatrick Sale

By Graham Bowley
Now comes Kosovo...and so the idea [of European Union] goes a step further: that Europe’s identification as a continent has become strong enough to rewrite the definition of nationhood itself. Now, perhaps, the continent as a whole can protect at least the self-governance of national groups too small and weak to form self-sufficient states of their own.
The agony of such national groups, when contained within larger states that oppress them, has, after all, been a historic source of genocidal mayhem on the Continent. The Yugoslav breakup showed that the century-old formula for self-determination — forcing together tribes who hate each other just to make them viable states — has failed. Now, rather than let the ministates that are breaking off founder, they may have a chance to make it anyway — as wards of the whole continent.

Reuter
In Washington, President Bush authorized the sale of weapons and other defense materiel to the government of Kosovo, a step that will almost certainly inflame Serbian and Russian officials who oppose Kosovo’s independence. In a formal notice to the secretary of state, Mr. Bush said the sales, along with defense training and military exchanges, would “strengthen the security of the United States and promote world peace.”

By Dan Bilefsky
Serbia formally proposed dividing newly independent Kosovo along ethnic lines, a move that was immediately rebuffed by Kosovo’s ethnic Albanian leadership in Pristina.
The proposal is the culmination of a campaign by Serbia to entrench its political and administrative control over the northern part of Kosovo, which has a Serbian majority. Kosovo’s leadership said they will not accept partition, and European countries and the U.S. would reject such a proposal.

“Not all secession movements have laudable objectives or deserve support.”
—Thomas Fleming.
The following article discusses a work of fiction, *The Shell Game*. The article presents the case made by author Steve Alten, and some experts on international affairs, that the government of the United States is planning a false flag attack on American soil. This attack is to be blamed on Iran, and would be used as an excuse to impose martial law and to attack Iran in order to take out the last remaining hurdle to the successful completion of the Project for a New American Century. The term “false flag” is both a common term, and a specific term of admiralty parlance, used to describe a ship that flies the colors of another country in order to disguise its identity.

*The Shell Game* is an endgame scenario. At stake are 1) the American empire and its hegemony over the Middle East, and 2) Planet Earth. The immediate challenges to the players of endgame are democracy in Saudi Arabia and a hostile Iran. The particular prize is the Ghawar oil field in Saudi Arabia.

The action takes place mostly in the year 2012, with a conservative 44th president (David McKinn) and a Neo-Con VP (Ellis Prescott). Prescott’s Neo-Con masters are planning to nuke an American city in order to free themselves from the restraints of the Constitution and international law, and to shake the public from its naive belief in such documents as well. The attack is to be blamed on Iranian terrorists with suitcase nukes. The attack will prove, of course, that the Neo-Cons were right all along to torture, to spy on Americans, and to invade Afghanistan and Iraq. The attack will justify the destruction of what’s left of the Constitution, and will clear the way for the attack against Iran. The Democrats will concur. But unlike the events surrounding the real 9/11, there lurks, in this work of fiction, a hero with the means and courage to bring the perpetrators to justice . . . maybe.

There are four different aspects to *The Shell Game*, three of which are essentially non-fiction. These take the form of quotes, a journal, and news reports. Among them are a concise history of the House of Saud, and also a concise and understandable explanation of Iran/Contra and the BCCI scandal.

The story is that the Neo-Cons in the media and in government were responsible for the 9/11 attacks. These forces are furthermore responsible for the failure to develop alternative energy, for the coming collapse if the US economy, and for shortages of food and water leading to mass starvation in the U.S. and around the world.

Alten’s reasoning is simple. The world is running out of oil. Oil supports transportation and food production. Without oil there will barely be enough food to support 20 percent of the world’s population. Those who get the oil will eat. Those who don’t will starve.

But fear not. The authorities have a plan: 1) Kill off entire populations with a pandemic before they get uppity, 2) Control the flow of oil, 3) Rig elections and suspend elections, 4) Suppress alternative news reports. Among them are a concise history of Iran and Al Qaeda. In the real world, they are not, perhaps, the threat that Alten’s characters perceive them to be. For the media, the shell game is to make us see a threat when there is none. In this regard, Alten has perhaps contributed to the shell game he so ardently attempts to expose.

But Alten does not pull his punches. He clearly blames the Neo-Cons for exacerbating anger and for intentionally driving the desperate to violence, and for using that anger to perpetrate the next 9/11. Alten outlines further that congress has handed every power the budding dictator could ever want to the executive branch. Congress has literally given the green light to a false flag attack against the United States by accepting the presidential directives of martial law (NSPD-31 and HSPD-20). Congress has also given the president the right to attack any country at will, imprison dissenters without trial, and send troops into our

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Free Vermont Media  The Shell Game and Other Errata From the Empire Jim Hogue

The book is called *The Shell Game* because we are the objects of a con. Our only role is to pay for it with our money or our lives.

The book has a slight jingoistic ring to it in its treatment of Iran and Al Qaeda. In the real world, they are not, perhaps, the threat that Alten’s characters perceive them to be. For the media, the shell game is to make us see a threat when there is none. In this regard, Alten has perhaps contributed to the shell game he so ardently attempts to expose.

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Food prices are on the rise. In 2007, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the cost of food rose 4 percent, the highest single-year increase in two decades, and it looks like food costs will go up another 4 percent in 2008. The prices for corn and soybeans are skyrocketing because of the increasing demand of crops for fuels such as ethanol. In addition, with higher transportation costs, it is costing more each day to ship food across the country and around the world.

Increasing food costs are affecting local food producers as well. Prices for basic ingredients such as wheat and sugar used in breads and baked goods are spiraling upwards. Farmers are being hit with increasing costs of grain to feed their animals and higher fuel costs to run their equipment. It is likely that we will see higher prices at the Farmers’ Markets when they open in May for the summer season.

There is one thing that we ALL can do to hedge against these rising food costs: we can all grow some of our own food.

Aaron Locker, an insightful commercial vegetable farmer and recent Vermont transplant explained to me the practical economics of commercial vs. home vegetable and fruit production. Commercial farmers need a lot of land because they have to grow a lot of food to have a financially viable farm; they need expensive equipment in order to efficiently plant, harvest, and wash their produce; they need an infrastructure for selling their products; they have to deal with perishable products that are only good for the compost heap if they don’t get sold.

By contrast, home gardeners need only a small piece of land to grow a good portion of their own food. The pragmatic and self-proclaimed “Contrary Farmer,” Gene Logsdon, claims that a family of four can produce three-fourths of its annual supply of fruits and vegetables on one-fifth of an acre of land. In addition, because of the small scale of a home garden, tilling, weeding and harvesting can be done by hand without the need for expensive gas-guzzling equipment.

It just makes practical and economical sense that if Vermont is going to be able to truly feed itself, we all need to grow at least some of our own food. A great place to start is to grow a vegetable that you eat a lot of and that is relatively expensive to buy. For most people, this would be tomatoes. If you are not excited about the idea of digging an in-ground garden, well-known Vermont gardener Ed Smith wrote an entire book on how to grow vegetables of all types in self-watering containers right on your front porch. Ed claims that he can grow more tomatoes at his Cabot, Vermont, homestead in pots than are produced from the same variety of plants in the ground.

After tomatoes, if you are up for growing a little more of your own food, consider adding salad greens to your home garden. Gourmet mesclun mixes are expensive to buy, but are easy to grow either in pots or in a small raised bed. Do succession seedings every three weeks or so and you will have the freshest greens you have ever tasted all summer long.

After the first successful year of growing tomatoes and salad greens the next logical step toward growing your own food is root vegetables. Carrots, beets and potatoes all grow really well in Vermont and take little attention once they are planted. These vegetables also all store well in make-shift root cellars, so not only will you be feeding yourself in the summer, but you will be able to eat your own home-grown food in the winter as well.

I am not suggesting that we all grow all of our own food and leave the farmers high and dry. Instead, if more Vermonters started thinking about supplementing what they buy from local farmers with a few selected home-grown items, it could significantly reduce the weekly grocery bill and make citizens of the Green Mountain State less dependent on food producers outside of the state.

Green thumbs not necessary, Vermont’s is a giving soil.

Gene Logsdon, the “Contrary Farmer,” claims that a family of four can produce three-fourths of its annual supply of fruits and vegetables on one-fifth of an acre of land.
Anthony Pollina, continued from page 4

yogurt, and sell them under the Vermont Milk Company label. We also make products for some other Vermont companies that have not been using raw material from Vermont, such as a cheese company in Bennington that used to bring in curd from Wisconsin.

We would like to bottle milk. We’ve been talking to schools, and there are a lot of schools in Vermont that would like to buy packaged milk for school lunches, so we hope to do that some time in the next few months. It would be a powerful message that Vermont can do these kinds of things. It’s a good model and we’re really enthusiastic about where it could go. In the scheme of things, when you look at economic development, the idea of having milk-processing plants and meat-processing plants, places where we can process more vegetables, even fruits, the investment is relatively small, but the return can be really great, economically as well as environmentally. The milk company is a good example of local economic development that can fit really nicely into a sustainable economy.

VC: Let’s follow up on the comment you made earlier about Vermont being a leader in the United States, being an exceptional place—everything from our local economy to our distinctive political culture. What does that mean for our relationship to the rest of the country? Do we fit into the United States, or are we so different that we don’t fit very well?

AP: I think we fit. The way we fit is by being able to set an example, by doing things on a scale that people around the country can’t always fully grasp, but I think we can do things that a lot of Americans wish in their hearts they could do in terms of supporting the local economy and having communities that are small and safe. The other side of it is that we’re losing that. If we don’t act to hold on to the uniqueness we have… We haven’t done that in recent years; the governor has basically taken on a mantra that government is bad, that we should all just be on our own, that we’re where kids learn to be citizens no matter what. They’re supposed to do, and by not really appreciating the need to keep schools in good condition, and to support public education. I used to run a small private high school, I’m not against people going to private schools if that’s what works, but I think public schools are our most important public institutions in the sense that for many of us they’re the center of our community, they’re where kids learn to be citizens no matter who they are. I think public schools need more respect and more support, and I think they need the flexibility to be able to meet the needs of all kinds of kids. Some learn well in the classroom, some would rather be out doing auto repair. There should be more community-based programs that are attached to public schools. We need to be growing good people who will engage in democracy. The federal government is in the exact opposite place.

VC: Let’s talk about agriculture around the state, almost in spite of what we’re talking about. The Vermont Agriculture Council has basically taken on a mantra that government haven’t done that in recent years; the governor doesn’t think but basically go along with and fit to into a corporate culture. It’s all about high-stakes testing, teaching to the test. I think what it does is take away the ability of teachers and schools, and kids then, to be creative, to actually be who they are. The federal government continues to do a big disservice on education on NCLB, also by not funding special education, which they’re supposed to do, and by not really appreciating the need to keep schools in good condition, and to support public education. I used to run a small private high school, I’m not against people going to private schools if that’s what works for them, but I think public schools are our most important public institutions in the sense that for many of us they’re the center of our community, they’re where kids learn to be citizens no matter who they are. I think public schools need more respect and more support, and I think they need the flexibility to be able to meet the needs of all kinds of kids. Some learn well in the classroom, some would rather be out doing auto repair. There should be more community-based programs that are attached to public schools. We need to be growing good people who will engage in democracy. The federal government is in the exact opposite place.

Douglas would be gone, but now you’ve got the federal government to deal with. AP: (laughs). There’s the practical, and then there’s the kind of emotional or spiritual level. On a practical level the federal government gets in the way of many good things that we want to do. First of all, they’re throwing hundreds of millions of dollars of our money (meaning here in Vermont) at a war that none of us want. To me it’s a major sign of what’s wrong with our democracy that 70 percent of the American people are against something, and yet it’s what we’re spending all our money on. I think the federal government, to a large degree, is controlled by special interests—the pharmaceutical companies, the health care companies, the Wall St. banks, the big polluters, the car industry. It’s not just a problem for Vermont, it’s a problem for a lot of people all around the country.

One thing a governor can do is engage people in Vermont in that conversation, so that we can look for creative ways to begin to become more self-reliant, self-sufficient. We can also talk to people in other states about that as well. We can start by standing up to the federal government, trying to stop the bleeding that the federal government causes us by taking our money and to some degree taking our spirit from us. Whether we could actually disengage from the other states… I don’t know. It’s an interesting concept to explore. I don’t think it would be number one on my agenda, but I think it would be a really interesting part of the conversation.

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Going back to the things we were talking about earlier, like economic self-sufficiency, that would begin to teach us some of the lessons. If we could achieve some of those things—buying local, strengthening the local economy—that might make it that much easier for Vermont and other states to start standing up to the federal government and saying “leave us alone” or “empower us at the state level to do the things we need to do.” Maybe by being a voice, we could encourage other states to think in a similar way. Maybe what actually happens is a group of states that decide to work together stand up to the federal government and say “leave us alone” or “empower us at the state level to do the things we need to do.” Maybe by being a voice, we could encourage other states to think in a similar way. Maybe what actually happens is a group of states that decide to work together stand up to the federal government and say “leave us alone” or “empower us at the state level to do the things we need to do.”
LocalWear: A Journey Into the Human Experience (Part 1)

Jeff Bickart

Yokelwear for the local bloke?
Because foreign cloth makes him wroth!
But about fine spun flax
For comfty underpants. And therein lies one of the many difficulties. Wool? Easy, but scratchy and hot. Linen? Difficult, but surely softer and cooler, as well as high-class. Linsey-woolsey? Perhaps a good compromise. Just say goodbye, alas, to comfty cotton, not to mention practical elastic waistbands. To be brief, as soon as I stepped into this project my unmentionables became not so, and indeed a topic of much technical discussion among my circle of “fiber friends.”

Accounts of “My year of…” (eating only local food, not shopping, not buying stuff made in China, being celibate, subsisting on brown rice and miso, living like the Amish without electricity, running a 26 mile race every week, …) are almost coming together as a new literary genre. Indeed, I almost cut myself well on my way not long ago to completing such a marathon—drinking only water for myself was well on my way not long ago to coming together as a new literary genre. Indeed, I was a big fan of human excretion, but I was not. It’s not about being an environmentalist, but it’s a good compromise. Just say goodbye, alas, to comfty cotton, not to mention practical elastic waistbands. To be brief, as soon as I stepped into this project my unmentionables became not so, and indeed a topic of much technical discussion among my circle of “fiber friends.”

But “localwear”? In March of 2004, I thought to myself, “Well, I can probably get the clothing made in a year, then that’s what I’ll wear exclusively for the next year. No problem.” Almost four years later, I’m still learning how to make stuff, still assembling the wardrobe, and I’m still wearing mostly clothing that came from who knows where, at no-doubt horrific environmental and social costs.

The fact is, of course, that as long as people have stood upright, with hands free to carry stuff, they’ve carried stuff long distances. Obsidian from Yellowstone to all over, chert from the Great Lakes to the Atlantic, salt across the Sahara, silk and tea and pepper from the mysterious Orient, nutmeg and cloves from the islands of southeast Asia to Europe… We always have and always will endeavor to acquire from far away necessary or desirable raw materials and finished goods that are not available where we live. Nothing inherently wrong in that. However, as hardly needs to be pointed out after the frenzied attention given to food in 2007, this trade now has become extraordinarily senseless, absurd, and destructive, possible only because of coal, petroleum, and natural gas, and the further lifespan of our modern sort of global trade is really quite limited. If the average bite of food travels 1,500 miles (a figure often given) from field to plate, and dozens of times more calories of fossil fuel energy are used to produce, process, and move food than the food itself contains, what can the figures be for the average cotton t-shirt? No doubt that shirt is racking up some serious frequent flyer miles, but it’s pretty clear that the jumbo jet is going to crash and the container ship is going to sink and, as Jim Kunstler never tires of pointing out, “we’ll have to make other arrangements.”

So, then, making my own clothing from domestic and wild plant and animal materials raised, grown, or gathered not too far away from home, processing them here, and assembling them into clothing using every possible sort of textile art. Here’s a list: sheep, llama, alpaca, Angora goat, Cashmere goat, and angora rabbit; flax; common milkweed, dogbane, and stinging nettle; cow, goat, sheep, and horse; moose, bear, coyote, beaver, skunk, woodchuck, muskrat, otter, fisher, and mink. In practice, I don’t much care for trapping, so that has knocked out much of the last group, except as road kills. Here’s another list: finger-twisted and thigh-rolled cordage, spinning with a drop spindle, and spinning with a spinning wheel; felting by rolling, and felting by rubbing; knitting; crocheting; weaving; tablet weaving, inkle weaving, backstrap loom, warp-weighted loom, rigid heddle loom, and floor loom; braiding, with nearly countless subdivisions; sprang, bark tanning and brain tanning. And another: hand cards, drum carder, picker; Viking combs, English combs, paddle combs, and diz; rippling comb, flax brake, skutching sword, hackles, and distaff; drop spindle, spinning wheel, lazy kate, middy-noddy, skin winder, and ball winder; and knitting needles, crochet hooks, and a fascinating collection of tools for weaving. Then there are madder, yellow bedstraw, woad, Japanese indigo, weld, goldenrod, tansy, hollyhock, dyer’s coreopsis, sumac leaves, hemlock bark, and lichens.

And so: knitted wool hat, felted wool hat, felted llama fiber hat, felted wool vest with deer antler buttons, felted wool/mohair coat (dyed shades of blue) with cherry buttons, knitted gray-brown and blue wool sweater, knitted and felted wool mittens, two pairs of wool/mohair socks (one pair blue, the other blue and green); all of the yarn handspun, almost all from hand-prepared (washed, carded) fiber, and the dyeing done with plants grown in our garden and with plants gathered nearby. Miles more handspun yarn, waiting to be turned into something. A braintanned buckskin shirt and buckskin pants, from deer shot in the area. Eight deerskins tanned with stag horn sumac leaves, not yet made into finished items of clothing or accessories.

All of this takes rather a lot of time: starting from the raw fleece(s), and teaching myself all the skills as I went, my first knitted hat took 27 hours to make; my first knitted sweater (including dyeing some of the yarn), 147 hours; my first pair of socks, 49 hours; my felted vest, 42 hours, and my felted coat, 59 hours. Making buckskin pants, starting with five raw white-tailed deer skins, 70 hours, and the buckskin shirt, 35 hours — and I already made lots of buckskin before these particular projects.

Beyond all these and the rest of the localwear not mentioned (not nearly enough, really, to live in for a year in all weather conditions) are the numerous articles made from non-local materials (for example, cotton warp and weft for tablet weaving) purchased to speed up the learning of various techniques before launching into a project with, say, some of the precious handspun. These lists show the complexly woven and richly textured fabric, as it were, of clothing production. The cultural heritage of all peoples, knitted together to make shelter for the body. Human history reaching back thousands of years, past even the domestication of animals in the Middle East around 8000 BCE, to the Palaeolithic or earlier, whenever it was that humans first figured out how to spin plant fibers and to throw the rough skins of animals over their shoulders. To explore this is a rediscovery of culture, and indeed, a rediscovery of being human.

It’s not that we’ve entirely forgotten how to make clothing for ourselves. After all, who doesn’t know a knitter or a crocheter who can turn out a hat in short order? Cozy handmade scarves are all over the place. Handmade mittens and sweaters and socks aren’t uncommon. These skills are not as moribund as, say, cooperating, cobbling, thatching, or... continued on following page
Large part for the same reason our pantries and closets full of clothing of mysterious provenance? In large part for the same reason our pantries and refrigerators are full of 1,500-mile (often 15,000-mile) food, cheap and easy. The fact is, Americans pretty much haven’t gotten their clothing from anywhere but a factory—and these days a distant factory—for at least a century and a half. The Industrial Revolution, with inventions like the spinning jenny, the spinning mule, the power loom, and the company town; the complex harnessing of water in favorable British and New England sites and the coal-fired steam engine—these took the making of clothing out of the home and the small workshop and into the factory. The inventiveness, persistence, vision, and enterprise of men like James Hargreaves, Richard Arkwright, Eli Whitney, and Francis Cabot Lowell brought inexpensive cotton goods to all. The story is riveting told in books like Big Cotton: The Industrial Revolution laid out in front of you as educational exhibits.

It probably isn’t reasonable to imagine that we will all clothe ourselves once again in homespun; there are too many of us. But I would like to suggest that a revival of both local handwork and regional industrial production will be not only practically necessary (as costs of long-distance shipment rise steadily with the cost of petroleum), but that it is, right now, spiritually necessary. I believe that a society or culture that doesn’t make most of its own stuff is a culture in decline, an attenuated, weak, impoverished culture. There is little real satisfaction in consumption; there is great and genuine satisfaction in production. Work with the hands is soul-strengthening. Done in company with others, it is a rich source of companionship. Some friends and I, here in Craftsbury, host through the winter in our homes, one or two Saturdays a month, “Crafternoons”—an open invitation to anyone to bring projects to work on, food to eat, and conversation to share. It is perhaps not really necessary to point out the pleasure in this sort of thing. It is worth adding, however, that, far from being drudgery, fine handwork can be a supreme intellectual challenge. Really understanding what’s going on with tablet weaving, for example, is as difficult as anything I’ve ever undertaken. Burrowing into the depths of even this one subject brings awe at the ingenuity, the cleverness, the technical excellence of my pre-industrial predecessors: modern machines are not even capable of doing what knowledgeable and clever human fingers can do; they do nothing more than work very, very fast.

The Zen of fleece washing
Any working with raw materials brings about transformations; that is one of the great pleasing things about starting from beginnings. There is no easier transformation to enjoy in the making of clothing than simply washing a sheep fleece. Off it comes in the spring, under the skilled blades of the shearer, and the naked animal runs off into the pasture. Its covering then goes into a big tub (I use the utility sink in one of our bathrooms, and in fact divide the fleece, doing small batches at a time), full of very hot water and lots of liquid dish soap. Gentle sloshing back and forth, and the water is astoundingly filthy. Think about it: that sheep hasn’t washed its hair in at least a year. The wool is full of dirt, sheep sweat, waxes, oils, sheep dandruff, sheep urine, balls of sheep poop, and countless bits of vegetation (including, at the worst, burdock burrs). After 10 minutes of soaking and gentle movement, the water is drained, and the tub refilled, as before, for a second washing. While that is going on, I go through the whole bath of once-washed wool, opening up with my fingers any tight or snarly spots in the wool. Then the second wash bath (much cleaner than the first; it may be re-used as the first wash bath for a second bath), and then two rinse baths, to get all the soap out, with water temperature kept consistent throughout. In the end after letting the wool drain, I lay it out on towels to dry. It is in this state, fresh and ready for making into something to keep a body cozy.

Once there were factories
So why are our dressers, wardrobes, and closets full of clothing of mysterious provenance? In large part for the same reason our pantries and refrigerators are full of 1,500-mile (often 15,000-mile) food, cheap and easy. The fact is, Americans pretty much haven’t gotten their clothing from anywhere but a factory—and these days a distant factory—for at least a century and a half. The Industrial Revolution, with inventions like the spinning jenny, the spinning mule, the power loom, and the company town; the complex harnessing of water in favorable British and New England sites and the coal-fired steam engine—these took the making of clothing out of the home and the small workshop and into the factory. The inventiveness, persistence, vision, and enterprise of men like James Hargreaves, Richard Arkwright, Eli Whitney, and Francis Cabot Lowell brought inexpensive cotton goods to all. The story is riveting told in books like Big Cotton: How a Humble Fiber Created Fortunes, Wrecked Economies, and Made America, with its magazine, Shuttle Spindle & Dyepot. Web sites abound: www.weavershand.com, www.braidershank.com, braintan.com, and numerous others. There are “sheep and wool festivals” in Vermont in September, in Rhinebeck (New York) in October, in New Hampshire in May, and one of the biggest, in Maryland, also in May, among others. In Vermont, everybody, whether in city, town, or country, can easily find someone with a sheep flock and extra wool to get rid of. In short, for making our own clothing the materials are available, the tools are available, the information is available, and with a little bit of inquiry one can find teachers eager to pass on the know-how.

A natural wardrobe. Jeff Bickart.

Letter, continued from page 3
Potential benefits of secession, to draw them into the movement. Obvious places to begin are with activist groups that already share significant portions of the independence agenda, i.e. Post Oil Solutions, but I also envision speakers going to churches and other more “mainstream” community groups. Speakers could also approach Vermont legislators to educate them about our movement and take their pulses on our issue.

As the movement grows, additional statewide gatherings could provide opportunities for people to form or join committees working on particular aspects of moving toward secession and envisioning our independent republic. Some might choose to work on envisioning governance during the transition between a Vermont state and a Vermont republic; others might turn their attention to making international contacts and garnering international political support for an independent Vermont. Need I mention that we’re going to need a committee willing to take on the dreaded task of fund raising?

I hope these thoughts will help spark inspired conversation and action among those of us dedicated to an independent Vermont.

Lisa Nash
Putney
Whole Systems Design, Inc. (www.wholesystemsdesign.com) describes its work as "occurring at the interface of people and land—where the built and biological environments meet." Based in Vermont’s Mad River Valley, Whole Systems Design integrates ecology, landscape architecture, site development, construction, farming, education, and other disciplines. Founder Ben Falk holds a master’s degree in landscape design and has taught at the University of Vermont and Harvard’s Arnold Arboretum. Vermont Commons Editor Rob Williams conducted this interview.

I read a recent article you wrote in which you stated “Climate change happens. Design for it.” What do you mean by this?  

Ben Falk: We need to prevent climate-changing activities as much as possible if we are to maintain a habitable planet, no doubt. However, the climate’s already changing, it always has, and it will continue to change, sometimes radically, even without human influence. How do we design for this?

Our work involves employing ecological design and permaculture strategies to develop buildings, landscapes, and communities that can be resilient in the face of increased climate variations—longer droughts, hotter summers, colder winters, more intense wind and ice storms, increased pests, heavier precipitation events, etc. Our site-design and development work buffers regional climates at the site level (microclimate development); diversifies biological systems and integrates them with built systems; holds water in the landscape; develops the highest quality, most durable and passive building systems; and employs many other techniques for dealing with the challenges posed by Earth’s changing climate and society’s hyper-dependence on dead-end resources.

You’ve spent some time thinking about how we might redesign Vermont in the face of what might politely be called our “carbon-constrained future” — dwindling access to cheap and abundant fossil fuel energy. What are some of the most immediate challenges Vermonters face as we enter the 21st century?

BF: Start with the big challenges we face today: climate change, peak oil, exercises in the hands of rogue organizations, a U.S. government prioritizing war over all other endeavors, dwindling reserves of fresh water and soil, etc. How might these problems play out in Vermont during the next few decades, and how do we respond?

Calculating your carbon footprint is a nice exercise, but first take the 30-second “will-you-survive-in-this-place” test.

Imagine your home in the following scenario:

The electrical grid is down and it’s not coming back up because Vermont Yankee had a major malfunction and Hydro Quebec pulled the plug after deciding that Canada or states downstream needed more electrical power (and could pay more for it) than Vermont. You’re out of heating oil and the delivery truck won’t come—even if you could afford the $5,000 fill-up. It’s January and an “Arctic clipper” is pushing minus-20-degree air into Vermont. The fridge is empty but you can’t afford the $10/gallon gas to get to the store. The septic system is full and the truck won’t come.

So let’s talk about moving forward. How do we think outside-the-box here?

BF: It’s silly that we’ve put ourselves in such a precarious position, because there are a few simple and affordable systems that could, at the home scale, fundamentally change this situation for the better. One’s called a composting toilet. Another is a big home vegetable garden, and gravity fed drinking water. Another is 20 fruit trees and a half acre of nut trees. Another is a root cellar. Another, better insulation and a masonry heater, or at least a wood stove. For the minority of us who can afford it, there are solar hot water and electric panels.

At the macro level it’s going to take investment by the public sector and those who can tip the scales of affordability for renewable technologies, local food systems, high-efficiency building systems, and the like: passive refrigerators, solar thermal panels, high-efficiency wood heaters, greenhouses, edible and highly productive landscapes. It’s going to take substantial state incentives, private investment and community/watershed-level initiatives to make the post-carbon systems shift happen.

The nearly complete lack of readiness of our rural population to provide themselves with a basic measure of food, water, shelter, and fuel is an urgent public-safety issue, and is antithetical to democracy.

The nearly complete lack of readiness of our rural population to provide themselves with a basic measure of food, water, shelter, and fuel is an urgent public-safety issue, and is antithetical to democracy. If our educational institutions address this challenge, it will be through reorganizing their programs at least in large part, to teach, as Abraham Lincoln put it, “the fine art of making a living from a small piece of land.”

We also need to think clearly about how we ought to spend the remaining petroleum in our fossil fuel savings account: We can burn petroleum only to burn more, like we are now. Or, we can use the remaining petroleum to establish energy, food, transport, and manufacturing systems that will durably function with little to no petroleum far into the future. Right now is the most affordable time to develop a sustaining economy of the future; it’s only getting more expensive each week.

The logical planning question is this: what does a more-localized future look like, without the destruction and hardship involved in the localization of the past? We need working examples of more sustainable food, fuel, electricity, and mobility systems at every scale in every valley and every village.

If our rural places are to support decent livelihoods into the post-fossil-fuel future, they will be organized to generate the most valuable nutrient and calorie-dense foods and fuels per acre.
U.S. society that frame our thinking here:

1. We are 80-percent urban (without significant production resources in the form of farms, forests, mines, etc.) and 20-percent rural.
2. We use almost all of our resources remotely from their source.
3. These resources are produced and distributed via petroleum at every step.
4. These resources are ever more difficult and expensive to obtain as long as they are remote and require non-renewable resources to source and distribute.

How do we turn this precarious situation into one in which our livelihoods are sourced from a more self-reliant and renewable powered regional and local economy?

Part of the challenge requires shifting from an import-based consumer culture into a generative “producer culture.” This involves a re-ruralization of the Vermont landscape, which will be producing not only most of what our own citizens need to live, but also producing many resources for larger population centers in our region like Montreal, Boston, and New York City – places that due, to their density, will continue to be sinks for most materials and energy resources (but providers of nutrients, information, and cultural resources). If we think ultra-dense urban centers will grow a meaningful fraction of their calories on roof top gardens, we are hopeful but not realistic.

If we imagine what a more regionalized and sustainable society will look like in five, ten, or 30 years, we realize that rural areas of this country are going to be pressured into performing the role that non-industrialized nations are performing today. The future success of rural societies is dependent upon the degree to which they develop regenerative working landscapes: places that produce more resources than they consume. Even Thomas Jefferson could not have realized the true extent to which the rural landscape of America will be the basis of its survival and success as a democracy. I think it’s clear that a primary way to overhaul U.S. society’s imperialistic underpinnings is through the redevelopment of a highly productive rural land base that is organized at more regional and local levels than the current global economy.

So, are you suggesting that we view Vermont as one large “producer culture”? BF: Yes, with an expanded idea of what the word ‘farm’ can mean – farm as sustainable production system; a renewing ecological system. Farming in contrast to mining. Today, even in Vermont, most agriculture and especially most forestry, extracts more value from the land than it cultivates; that’s mining. But this can easily change: Vermont is positioned to become a leading example of a cold-climate rural land-based economy. What kinds of planning and land use does this entail?

Examples of such land use are already under-way in parts of Europe where there are states with 100-year land-management plans for everything from nut-producing forests to aquaculture, to ecological restoration to pasture land systems, so that the land offers the most value possible to the citizens of the nation. Intergenerational land management is a precursor to a sustainable democracy.

Vermont would provide leadership in regenerative rural economic development by implementing a statewide diverse-yield planning process based on important questions such as:

1. What is Vermont most suited to producing?
2. What are the current and future markets for these yields – who and where are they?
3. How will we distribute these yields within the state and out of state?
4. Which region within the state is most suited to each yield? We would sector-ize the state into zones of use and production just like one would do with a profitable and well-managed farm.

There are many global leaders in regenerative economic development already working in Vermont. The state can get these players together to help integrate the diverse aspects of a more abundant economy.

Okay. So what kinds of projects would be most strategic in transitioning Vermont into a more locally reliant, productive landscape? BF: There are numerous initiatives that could be started tomorrow with great success if the social and monetary capital was ready to back it. Some of that capital is already emerging, as many of these projects simply represent profitable business investment opportunities. Whole Systems Design is working with several investors and two foundations to begin to implement these and other similar projects.

Here are five tip-of-the-iceberg suggestions for projects that a Vermont seriously interested in pursuing democracy, sustainability, and profitability would explore.

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communities. All the president has to do is to declare the next attack on American soil to be terrorist. There will be no one to refute it, as Congress, the judiciary, the media, and the peace movement have all made their beds by handing him a pass on 9/11.

Look to Homeland Security via the media to report an increase in "terrorist activity." Note the upcoming successes of the FBI. The next few months (no need to wait for 2012) will uncover chemical weapons, dirty bombs, Al Qaeda cells, and enriched uranium, all traceable to Iran. These warnings may prepare us, psychologically, for the next false flag attack on American soil. The evidence of Iran's guilt will be dutifully reported. There will be no contradictory reports. World War III will begin.

Endgame. And all because no one in authority will investigate the evidence and accuse the administration of complicity in the 9/11 attacks.

Errata 1: From False Flag Prospects 2008 — Top Three U.S. Target Cities

by Captain Eric H. May

Captain Eric H. May suggests that Houston and Portland are the targets that the Bush Administration has chosen for the next false flag attack. He quotes a warning from Bush himself.

"Good morning. At this moment, somewhere in the world, terrorists are planning new attacks on our country. Their goal is to bring destruction to our shores that will make September the 11th pale by comparison."


Writes Captain May: "I can’t think of a more important question than the one of where the next 9/11 will be attempted. Common sense dictates to all of us who understand the truth about 9/11 that its perpetrators must strike again. Indeed, every directive, act, and decision of our post-9/11 unitary executive, cowards Congress, and Judas judiciary has increased the power of the federal government to wage the Global War and impose the Homeland State.

"Why on earth would those guilty of mass murder, high treason and war crimes fail to follow up on their earlier efforts? They understand quite well that the Global War is going badly and the Homeland State is becoming onerous, and that only a reapplication of false flag terror will force the American people to proceed with our post-9/11 national insanity.

"Still, for every one person who republishes or constructively comments on this essay, there will be another who employs division, abuse, and ridicule against me or anyone else who asserts the common sense point that false flaggers will continue to false flag.

"We can only stop the deadly drift of America by understanding 9/11 and anticipating the next 9/11. Many of the vociferous voices impeding our understanding and anticipation are performing a vital service for treason."

(Captain May is a former Army military intelligence and public affairs officer, as well as a former NBC editorial writer. His political and military analyses have appeared in The Wall Street Journal, the Houston Chronicle and Military Intelligence Magazine.)

Errata 2: Anthrax and Leahy

In my interview with Steve Alten on WGDR on March 3, 2008, I asked him what he thought about Senator Leahy’s silence and obeisance to the Bushists after receiving the anthrax letter, subsequent to which Leahy voted for the PATRIOT Act (USAPA). I said to Steve Alten, "You are a senator. You have, in your possession, the evidence that will sink the perpetrator of the attack. You find out that the anthrax comes from the U.S. lab in Fort Dietrich, Maryland. You do nothing. You pretend it is not relevant. And you vote for an act which you know is despicable and unconstitutional. You later commend the 9/11 Commission for its definitive work even though it does not mention the lethal anthrax attack. How do you explain that?"

Alten’s reply: "Gutless."

And who among them isn’t? They have no qualms sending soldiers to their deaths and inflicting state terror on Afghanistan and Iraq, but they will do nothing to ruffle the feathers of those responsible for the 9/11 attacks. "Gutless," yes. And far worse.

And Alten added that the patriots of today are those Americans who are honestly involved in the 9/11 Truth movement. Just as the patriots of yesterday were those who fought for American Independence.

The obvious and frightening conclusion that we must draw is that the next attack will be covered up as well by the traitors of today, from its inception through its conclusion. Zbigniew Brzezinski warned of the next false flag operation, but not one Senator will even admit that the 9/11 Commission lied.

The alternative to prosecuting the crimes of 9/11 is the next 9/11, for which congress and the media have paved the way. •
He prefers not to think about money but he doesn’t have that luxury. The trust-fund gene skipped his family, and it’s been thus far a life of fiscal constraint. Not that he’s complaining; He’s done good enough to keep gas in the Chevy and shoes on the boys. The roof doesn’t leak, even when it’s raining. There’s milk in the fridge and ammo for the rifle. He is not impoverished.

Still, that stimulus check. He can’t stop thinking about it. They’re gonna max it out, him and the Mrs., what with the modest income and pair of dependents. Eighteen hundred bucks he’s got coming, and hot damn but ain’t that a pretty good payday! Okay, so he wasn’t born yesterday; he knows nothing comes for free; he knows he has paid and will pay for years to come, that the $1,800 can’t begin to compensate for the almost surreal way in which he and so many middle-income Americans have been robbed in the hot light of midday.

But that’s that hard truth whether or not he takes that $1,800 and mainlines it into the consumer economy. So he’s going shopping.

First, he’ll celebrate with a few sixers of Rock Art’s IPA. He sees himself sitting and sipping on his porch in the soft light of a late-June evening, musclesore from pitching bales of first cut, or maybe splitting chunks of hard maple, savoring the fatigue and the early-summer rightness of everything; the cows lolling, the pigs settling in for the evening, the goddamn rooster quiet for once, the sweet corn just beginning to sprout little ears.

And then: He’s got the addition to the barn already sketched out in his mind. A little sheepfold, a simple thing built on fat cedar logs he’ll pull from the woods with the tractor. But he’ll need some siding, a few hundred board feet of rough-cut spruce from the yard at P&R Lumber in Hardwick, one of those rare Vermont businesses that still close for hunting season and don’t keep a website. He’s got his eye on a pile of used roofing down the road; he’ll strike a deal.

The Chevy needs a windshield, so he guesses he’ll do that, too, unless he chooses to forego the inspection and insurance and relegate the beast to backroads and farm duty, which is damn tempting what with gas closing in on $4 and the ol’ 454 bringing 8 mpg on a good day.

He sees himself sitting and sipping on his porch in the soft light of a late-June evening, savoring the fatigue and the early-summer rightness of everything.

Maybe instead he’ll mosey down to Onion River Sports (yeah, it means going into Montpelier and subjecting himself to all the progressive righteousness of the place, to which the only sensible antidote is to pilot the Silverado down State Street, squinting through the cracked windshield and blasting David Lee Roth-era Van Halen from the tape deck) and spend some money on one of them trailers that hook onto your bike. Wouldn’t that be cool? Pedaling down the road, Ozzy on the iPod, the trailer stacked with a couple gallons of raw milk from the farm on the other side of town. Yes, a trailer.

Piglets. A couple of fall piglets would be good, because piglets get cheap in the fall and there’s lots of garden detritus to feed them. He’ll slaughter right before Christmas and there’ll be ham on the table with the potatoes they dug back in October and the last salad they picked out of the greenhouse just that morning.

Goodness. He’s still got almost $1200 tucked into the little slit he cut in the trailer. The ol’ 454 bringing 8 mpg on a good day.

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Reduce some of the need for the intense mobility
opportunities in each neighborhood that will also
energy. Such a shift will create employment
food, community, information, materials and
being resource sinks to productive generators of
will depend upon their ability to transition from
afford inhabiting the suburbs or abandon them
culture systems. Whether we can continue to
ance better-than-organic, bio-intensive, perma-
the remaining common lands as high-perform-
corridors, re-insulating buildings, and developing
soil-building plants, restoring stream and wildlife
rhythms and adjacent to the interstate highways of Ver-
This number, by the way, includes a safety
sightline and snowplow buffer immediately next
to the roadway.

Part of the challenge requires shifting from an import-based consumer
culture into a generative “producer culture.”

Currently, the state spends more money mowing
these 3,000 acres than would be required to
plant and maintain an edible agroforestry system
on 30 feet of the median and on 10 feet on each
side of the roadway. Such a statewide perennial
tree crop system would support almost 1,000 trees
per mile of roadway with about 250,000 trees in
all, sequester more than 5 million pounds of car-
bon per year, and produce more than 5 million
pounds of nutrient-dense nuts per year.

Those are remarkable numbers.

BF: This system would have untold wildlife-
supporting benefits for birds, bear, and other ani-
imals due to the nut-bearing trees. The economic
value of nuts alone would be more than $10 mil-
lion per year after the system matured in about 15-
20 years.

Using currently low-value land like highway
medians in such a long-term way would generate
more than $200 million of tree nuts at current
market prices in a 40-year span. Why we didn’t
farm the most accessible arable land in the state
will be a hard one to explain to our children.

But won’t planting median nurseries attract animals to the
Interstate, causing all kinds of problems? Roadkill, for
example?

BF: Yes, nurseries attract and grow wildlife. But the
idea that we shouldn’t farm this or that landscape
because cars could interrupt the process is planning
our landscape around the automobile, which is not
the best strategy toward a more livable future.
There are also a lot of other valuable uses for this
undervalued land: soil building and carbon seques-
tration cropping, and/or perennial biofuel crop
production. Most of this land is an accessible grade
and location to mechanized harvesting methods.

Other ideas?

BF: Why not increase the value of Vermont’s ski
slopes by grazing Brown Swiss, Jersey, and other
alpine-appropriate cows, goats, and sheep?
They’ve been doing this in Austria for a long time. Why
would we mechanically mow the state’s
steepest hillside at an expense when the same
land can turn a profit instead?

Imagine our vast, public mown turf areas trans-
formed into fruit and nut orchards. We can gen-
erate 1,000 new high-quality jobs in the state in the
span of a year, as well as stimulate the local econ-
omy and increase local food security by producing
100,000 pounds of fruit and nuts per year on lands
that are currently mowed resource sinks. Part of a
livable future involves replacing fossil fuel-driven
lawn mowers with human-powered shovels,
seedlings and jobs.

Make the care, harvesting, and processing of
these tree crops a food bank program, F.E.E.D.
program, corrections/rehabilitation, and/or
other local group program. Use existing funding
streams to do the planting by employing police-
men and women in a direct public service. Have
them plant trees side-by-side with inmates: a reha-
bilitation program for prisoners and a public serv-
ce by our uniformed officers. Have the National
Guard and the Green Mountain Boys join in.
Police and soldiers planting trees, tending public
food gardens, installing solar panels – that’s home-
land security.

Why should we wait for another dust bowl or
depression for state-supported land development?
Vermont is positioned to show the nation what a
New Deal for the 21st century would look like.
We have time perhaps for one more big push like
we saw in the 1930s. Imagine if the Work’s
Progress Administration had established tree-
based agricultural systems that would now be
bearing trillions upon trillions of calories for use
continued on following page
continued from previous page

As food and fuel oils, carbon banks, wildlife production zones, and beauty.

We could evolve the Current Use program to incentivize multiple outputs of our complex forests instead of only saw-logs and cordwood. We still call timber management plans ‘Forest Management Plans.’ We’ve totally missed the forest for the trees and have let simplistic silviculture dominate the management of complex, multiple-yield woodlands. Whole forest management would promote diverse-yields such as ginseng and other high-value understory medicinal herbs, edible mushrooms, hazelnuts and other nut shrubs, and tree crops including hickory, pecan, walnut, chestnut, and sweet acorn, varieties of burr, white and English oak, and much more wildlife. We can increase wildlife production by multiple factors through increasing the caloric yields of the Vermont forest, stimulate the hunting economy and value the 80 percent of our state as the abundantly productive forest garden it could be.

When Vermonters move to create an independent republic, I’m going to nominate you for Secretary of Agriculture. How long will it take Vermont to re-invent itself as an independent republic, do you figure?

BF: The degree to which we become more independent and free politically is highly dependent on the degree to which we get the two primary aspects of our inter-dependence in order: Economy and policy.

Vermont becoming more independent politically would most-effectively be preceded by Vermont becoming more independent and generative economically. Broad-scale regenerative land use is the foundation of enduring personal and collective freedom.

By “economy” I mean the basic needs: food, shelter, water, health care, energy, some mobility. I think the economic foundation of any place needs to be strong before a place can be its own polity. Can we imagine a desirable independent republic without a vastly more sustainable, more self-sufficient economy? Vermont imports almost all of its basic economic resources. Vermont becoming more independent politically would most-effectively be preceded by Vermont becoming more independent and generative economically. Broad-scale regenerative land use is the foundation of enduring personal and collective freedom.

There’s a lot of talk and some action about making this happen. Take Pete’s Greens for example. This is a solid model of local economic health; they produce enough vegetables for about 1,000 people, I am told. Vermont has about 620,000 people. So at some point in the future the market will support 620 more season-extended, diverse vegetable farms. That’s fantastically good economic news.

That’s an entire fiscal platform for a politician right there. “I will see to it that this state incubate another 100 organic farms equipped with passive solar greenhouses, per year, for the next six years.” I can hear it now.

I can, too. But let’s not wait for the politicians to lead. It is up to us to begin this work on our homesteads and in our communities. Any last thoughts?

BF: With vision and planning, Vermont could manage the state’s landscape as the first continental re-development project, in which the colonial settlement methods we’ve tried since 1492 would be overhauled and rebuilt to be more durable, more profitable, more collective, and more democratic. It is clear that the development of a local living economy is the most direct way to connect ourselves to one another, to rebuild and reinvent our culture, to celebrate the beauty of this place, and our lives within it.

And economic independence can lead us to political independence. Thanks for speaking with us. We’ll remind readers to find out more about your work at www.wholesystemsdesign.com.
A recent survey by the UVM Center for Rural Studies found that 77.1 percent of the eligible voters in Vermont, up from 74.3 percent a year earlier, believe that the U.S. government has lost its moral authority. This is hardly surprising when you consider the fact that our government is owned, operated, and controlled by Corporate America. National elections are bought and sold to the highest bidder. It was the loss of moral authority that brought down the apartheid government of South Africa, the communist regimes in six Eastern European countries, and the moribund Soviet Union.

Most left-leaning Vermonters are convinced that Obama represents the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

According to this same poll 48.7 percent of Vermonters think the United States has become unsustainable (politically, economically, militarily, and environmentally).

And a recent New York Times/CBS News poll indicates that the views of Vermonters differ little from those of most other Americans. “Americans are more dissatisfied with the country’s direction than at any time since the 1990s.” Eighty-one percent of the respondents to this poll said that they believed “things have pretty seriously gotten on the wrong track,” up from 69 percent a year ago.

Even though most Vermonters believe America is going to hell in a handbasket, 87.2 percent of them still believe that the country is governable and 93.6 percent think it is actually fixable. How is this possible?

And who do they think is going to fix it? Barack Obama.

Most left-leaning Vermonters are convinced that Obama represents the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. With his feel-good message of hope and change he can surely walk on water. But is it really so?

For example, few Americans realize that Obama’s 2002 speech, in which he expressed opposition to the pending war in Iraq, was, in fact, a pro-war speech, not an anti-war speech. His opposition to the war stemmed from his fear that it was the wrong war and that Americans might become disillusioned by its failure, possibly turning them against all wars. Obama is a strong supporter of the war in Afghanistan.

Even more revealing is Obama’s principal foreign policy advisor – vehemently anti-Soviet cold warrior Zbigniew Brzezinski. Not unlike Bill Clinton, Obama is a military hawk disguised as a liberal. Furthermore, there is little evidence that he could stand up to the Israeli lobby. In other words, as far as foreign policy goes, it would be business as usual.

Although Obama is an articulate, intelligent, charismatic speaker, who is long on political rhetoric, he is short on hard-nosed, specific solutions for America’s plethora of extremely complex, interdependent problems. For example, how will he deal with soaring crude oil prices, the collapse of the real estate bubble, the subprime loan crisis, the crash of the dollar, failing infrastructure, and turmoil in the Middle East? These are very difficult problems.

Barack Obama is not going to prevent the ship of state from going down. At best, his touchy-feely message is illusory. At worst, it represents a cruel hoax. •
Keep It In Vermont, continued from page 3

solar hot water systems? This would require an initial investment in non-local technologies like solar panels or turbines (with the help of Vermont’s alternative energy industries), but the resulting energy generated would stay in the local economy, particularly if families and neighborhoods explored micro-grid possibilities and new net-metering options.

In most towns, the public school building facilities represent a town’s most significant asset. Why not pool together “found” money to equip our schools’ rooftops with solar panels and/or solar hot water/biomass heating systems? This has the added benefit of educating Vermonters in the importance of energy conservation and alternative energy production at a time when we ought to be giving serious attention to these questions. Whatever we decide to do with our “rebate” money (and maybe you’ll decide to save it), the federal government’s $107 million “stimulus” plan offers Vermonters a unique opportunity to stimulate a wide array of alternative food, energy, entrepreneurial and nonprofit endeavors right here in our communities around the Green Mountains. And given the current course of the U.S. Empire as it speeds toward the cliff of financial collapse, this opportunity may not present itself again any time soon.

So, check out the www.keepitinvermont.org website, make a pledge to stimulate your neighbors, and tell your Vermont friends and associates about how you plan to “Keep it in Vermont” •
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The Vermont Design for Education

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The Vermont Design for Education: The Process for Improved Learning Opportunities

In the Vermont Design for Education, the process for improved learning opportunities is described as a way to ensure that learning is meaningful and engaging for students. The design emphasizes the importance of creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment that fosters curiosity and critical thinking.

1. The emphasis must be on learning, rather than teaching.
   Education is a process centered to benefit the learner. Central to any learning is the individual and how his learning process may be maximized.
   This idea is basic and pervades the foundation for other elements of quality education.

2. A student must be accepted as a person.
   His feelings and ideas deserve consideration and his opinions are human responses. He should have the right to decide what he is to do; he should be encouraged to do with responsibility, to question, to discuss with teachers, to ask authors or other authorities. He must, however, do more than decide; he must strive to seek solutions to those issues which he questions. Each individual must be free to determine whether a position is being advocated by an authority or another student is justified and voiced.

3. Education should be based upon the individual's strong, inherent desire to learn and to make sense of his environment.
   Desire to learn is accelerated when the experiences are stimulating and non-threatening. Learning about things in a natural part of a child's life, and in the process of growing up, the better part of living is done productively.
   The infelicitous requirement to basic formal learning is internal, based upon a child's desire to answer a question, solve a problem, fill a gap in his knowledge, make things fit together, solve a pattern, to discover one's own. When a child finds that knowledge is insufficient rewarding in itself; he makes him happy to have learned and eager to learn more. This internal motivation must also become the basis for learning in the school situation. If school work is to absorb him, the manner of teaching, organizing, grouping, and testing must meet the initial enthusiasm with which a child enters school. The structure of the school must complement the natural way children learn.

4. All people need success to prosper.
   Success is no exception. A continual series of failures, if experienced in the school, can lead to a negative self-image, loss of face, loss of desire to continue to participate, and an urge to seek that success outside of the school situation. A school situation should be flexible and supportive enough to allow each person regularly to find some measure of success.

5. Education should strive to maintain the individuality and originality of the learner.
   The school's function is to expand the differences between individuals and create a respect for those differences.

6. Emphasis should be upon a child's own way of learning—through discovery and exploration—through real rather than abstract experiences.
   At no time in a person's life does one learn more or better than during early childhood. It is most revealing to watch a young child in the learning process—exploring, testing, trying and finding that he can manipulate to discover their interactions, rather than being housed with a part of numbers in an arithmetic textbook.

7. The development of an individual's thought process should be primary.
   The learning of facts should be de-emphasized; facts should become the building blocks for generalities and processes.
   The ability to solve problems, whether social, mathematical, or economic, must be given prominence. A person equipped to function adequately is able to make his knowledge to new situations in order to solve new problems. He can use judgment and forethought he is able to reason and imagine. That a person can produce products as well as solve them.

8. People should perceive the learning process as related to their own sense of reality.
   There must be a conscious effort to make the readings, discussions and issues heard in school relate to the world which people experience: to what they see, where they hear, and what they read in the newspaper.
   Schools cannot expect the trust and understanding of their students if agriculture is discussed in terms of the abstract family farms, but these same students perceive around their farmland conditions and understand migrant labor.

9. An individual must be allowed to work according to his own abilities.
   Students in an environment that meets their needs, seeing others working toward the same goals, are more likely to work at their own rate, to develop their own unique style of learning, conceptualizing and organizing together the parts to form coherent patterns. Learning experiences must be geared broadly to meet rather than group norms.

10. The teacher's role must be that of a partner and guide in the learning process.
    The role of the teacher must not be one of imparting knowledge, someone who knows all the answers and is never wrong, but rather one who possesses those skills necessary to establish an appropriate learning climate, both at times as well as in equipment and materials. The teacher must constantly be aware of each person's abilities and accomplishments, find that person from one level of conceptualization to the next. This becomes a creative process of helping a child make a logical learning process, involve him in the planning and designing, the execution process which allows him the freedom and responsibility of learning deeply involved. The teacher must extend the student's
Third, military overstretch. Empires are by definition colonizers, and trying to keep control over hostage peoples by force inevitably leads to large and often uncontrollable armies, massive drains on the economy, and ultimately rebellion on the periphery. As the Roman empire collapsed when the “barbarians” at its frontiers revolted and the Roman legions, stretched from Germany to Africa to Persia and grown unruly and corrupt, were defeated, as the Persian empire fell in the 5th century BC because it was unable to maintain the colonies it had established from India to Africa and the peripheries rose in revolt, so the American empire is overextended, weakened at the peripheries, forced to use ill-equipped and undertrained troops to maintain it, and even the generals admit it can’t be sustained.

We have 547,000 – more than half a million – active troops, based at (this is amazing and little noticed) more than 725 military bases in at least 40 countries around the world, and our attempt to do so has been a disaster.

And all of that to try to maintain an empire that is already shrinking. Latin America, which used to have U.S. colonies from Cuba to Argentina, has thrown off most American influence, installed governments hostile to America and welcoming to the Chinese, and mostly refused to bow down to the “structural adjustments” that the World Bank used to be able to use to manipulate their economies. You know your empire is collapsing when the leader of one of those South American countries that we used to have in our pocket, and whom we couldn’t pull off a coup to oust, comes to the United Nations and makes fun of your emperor, saying he smells sulphur where the emperor just was standing.

All of the Moslem world is hostile to American interests and policies, including the Saudis leading the jack-up of oil prices; so is much of South Asia, and American prestige and influence has fallen considerably in Europe, central Asia, and Japan. We are good friends with Slovenia, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan, that’s about it.

For all of our 725 bases, we no longer control the world, and our attempt to do so has been a disaster.

Fourth: empires fall because of domestic discontent and upheaval. Crashing economies, food shortages, political repression, military drain, and increasing disparities between the rich and poor create domestic discontent that, lasting long enough, lead to rebellion and civil war. As the Mughal empire of India collapsed when excessive taxes to support the military led to armed resistance, as the Aztec empire collapsed when its population showed no interest in defending the central government that had been bleeding them of tribute when the Spanish arrived, so the American empire faces a prospect of increasing discontent and division, malaise and disaffection – even a growing movement toward outright secession, now with organizations in at least 30 of the 50 states. It is not yet revolt and rebellion, but the institutions of this nation – presidency, vice presidency, Pentagon, Congress, the lot – are held in greater disdain and disrepute today than any time since opinion polls began to measure this, and rightly so.

You know your empire is collapsing when you spend billions of dollars that you don’t have, to create a missile system that doesn’t work, to use against an enemy that you don’t have either.

For all of our 725 military bases, we no longer control the world. We are now fighting in four admitted wars from Eritrea to the Philippines and winning none of them.

[You know your empire is collapsing when, according to a poll taken in the fall of 2006 by the Opinion Research Corporation and broadcast by CNN on October 23, 71 percent of your citizens agree that “our system of government is broken and cannot be fixed,” and another 7 percent agree it is broken but “hoped” it could be fixed.]

Get out while there’s time

Well it’s not rebellion, thanks to the increasing sweeping of illegal repression of dissent by the Bush regime – leading up to, by the way, the vicious McCarthyistic House Resolution 1955 passed 404 to 5 and sent to the Senate, the Violent Radicalization and Homegrown Terrorism Prevention Act, nothing less than the establishment of thought police to find and jail anybody that thinks unpleasant and subversive thoughts about this nation.

Thanks also, I should note, to the success of the system’s modern version of bread and circuses, a unique combination of entertainment, sports, television, internet sex and games, consumption, drugs, liquor, and religion that has so far successful deadened most of the general public into apathetic stupor.

But it is hard to believe that a nation that is, first, so thoroughly corrupt as this – in all its fundamental institutions, its boughten parties, military contractors, academies, corporations, banks, brokerages, accountants, governments – and, second, so thoroughly economically unequal (2005 figures show that the income of the 3 million Americans at the top was equal to that of the 166 million at the bottom) can survive without revolt.

The Bush Administration has shown, in fact, that it is not capable of governing a population of this size and complexity – Katrina above all, energy deregulation (Enron etc.), subprime credit collapse, unregulated housing boom, gasoline mileage, FDA inspections, mine-safety inspections, no-bid contracts to favorites, misuse of wiretapping, Abramoff-Delay bribery, consumer product safety… the list of failures go on – and there’s no imaginative successor that could; the empire is too vast and intricate, the homeland is too immense and diverse, the systems are too complicated and fragile. The citizens will someday rise in protest, I predict.

Those four processes by which empires inevitably fall – environmental, economic, military, and civil – are inescapably operative now, in this latest empire. I would be willing to make a sizeable bet that a combination of several or all of them will bring about its collapse within the next 10 years. The lesson from Jared Diamond’s recent book Collapse is that almost no society is capable of escaping the kinds of peril that an empire like this faces.

Unless you secede from it, and the sooner the better. You know your empire is collapsing when that idea just makes plain good sense.
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