Vermont Independence Candidates Gaining Traction

Wars’ Casualties, Wars’ Costs ($1.5 Billion Annual Bill for Vermont) are Key Issues

Will Lindner

They are the advance guard. While no candidate would endure the sacrifices, the rigors, and sometimes the humiliations, of running for office with the intention of losing, in this election year of 2010 Vermonters are encountering a different kind of contender for statewide and legislative office: candidates with a vision that extends beyond themselves and beyond this year. They want to change the political conversation, break through the barriers that the system (which very much includes the media) has created, and help Vermonters contemplate the previously unthinkable and conventionally unacceptable premise of independence.

But what is “independence”? Its ultimate expression for Vermont would be seceding from the United States of America and forming what proponents are calling the Second Vermont Republic (the first Vermont Republic existed for 14 years before Vermont joined the United States in 1791).

That’s what Dennis Steele favors, and it is the thrust of his campaign for governor. “I’m straightforward and direct about Vermont becoming an independent republic,” says Steele, a native Vermonter from the Caledonia County town of Kirby. “This is the only issue. We’re going to have to deal with the Empire [the United States] or start getting Vermont to save the Empire. We have to choose, and it’s for the sake of our children and their future that we need to come to grips with this and secede from the U.S.”

Peter Garritano shares that opinion. The Shelburne resident is the independence candidate for lieutenant governor. “There are horrible things going on, perpetuated by the Empire,” Garritano said (while making plans to attend a memorial event for the U.S. nuclear attack on Hiroshima). “We believe

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Most Likely To Secede: U.S. Empire, Vermont Secession, Citizen Journalism, And Media Democracy (Part 1)

Rob Williams

“What’s the dirtiest word in U.S. politics? A few hints. It begins with an “S,” and, in its verb form, sounds like “succeed.” It is a word that even many well-educated Americans have trouble pronouncing, let alone spelling.

It is the founding principle of the United States as a political creation. With help from Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and the first Continental Congress, Thomas Jefferson enshrined this key political concept as the first action verb – “dissolve” – in the 1776 Declaration of Independence.

It was a constitutionally legitimate and widely affirmed concept, publicly agreed upon by political leaders from both Northern and Southern states, during the first 70 years of the U.S. republic.

Numerous new 19th-century American states, from Maine to Kentucky, employed it in hiving off from existing states.

Invented in the South, it was first championed as a regional movement by 19th-century New Englanders. And since President Lincoln’s successful victory over the Southern states in the so-called “Civil War,” it has been largely forgotten.

The dirtiest word? Secession.1 A little revisionist history is useful.

The 18th-century American “revolution,” really an English colonial struggle to secede from the British Empire and establish “free and independent states,” was built on it and 19th-century northern and southern political leaders alike embraced it. Nineteenth-century New Englanders talked openly for decades about secession, in response to federal abuses of power

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Join the Vermont Commons Cooperative for 2011, receive a FREE silver “Freedom and Unity” coin, and read more about how to reclaim Vermont’s currency commons – details inside this issue.

ON THE WEB
- Huffington Post covers Vermont Independence (Christopher Ketcham)
- Collapse: A Personal Invitation (Jasmine Lamb)
- Grace Potter Live on Lake Champlain (Katherine Maund)
- Your cards, letters and more. (Blogroll)

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Six-Day Vermont Road Trip Brings A Blast Of Hope

We at Vermont Commons: Voices of Independence news journal quietly celebrated our fifth birthday last spring.

As a founding partner in our nonprofit news venture, I find it hard to believe that we published our first issue – a mere 12 pages with just a few advertisements – in April 2005. Back then, during the height of the Bush/Cheney regime, we distributed our monthly journal through a network of several volunteers across the state, and as an insert in Vermont Guardian, a weekly independent newspaper (now defunct).

Five years later, as Team Obama continues its imperial status quo policies, it is gratifying to see our little start-up independent journal now running at 32 pages per issue, with some courageous thinking, visionary (and often curmudgeonly) writing, and more and more statewide businesses using us as a multimedia platform to market their goods and services than ever before.

Just as exciting? The transformation of our Vermont independence conversation into a fledging but genuine political movement, with a dozen Vermonters from around the state running for political office on an independence platform this fall. (Read Will Lindner’s two-part feature, and see many of the candidates’ profiles in the summer 2010 issue of Vermont Commons, now online.)

To celebrate our fifth birthday, I spent six days this past June driving around our once-and-future Vermont republic. As publisher, my official mission involved seeking new distribution locations for Vermont Commons. While we’ve been a statewide presence for several years, I knew there were a number of neighborhoods in the greater Green Mountains where our newspaper wasn’t yet available – towns with names like Belvidere, Leicester, Adamant, and Orange, which didn’t yet have regular print access to our ideas. Selfishly, too, I wanted to get out of my own head, meet Vermonters where they live, work, and play, and take some time to experience the sights, smells, and sounds of our beautiful state.

My route, as anyone who has traveled Vermont knows, was circuitous by nature, as our “can’t get there from here” topography encourages meandering, rather than straight A-to-B sojourns. Beginning in the Mad River Valley, I headed northeast, through the Northeast Kingdom all the way up to Derby Line and points east. From there, I steered my Subaru west to Lake Champlain, crossing the Green Mountains up by Jay Peak, and then ascended down their western spine through Rutland and Bennington. I finished by winding through the middle portion of the state, over to the Connecticut River, and upward to the bulge that marks Vermont’s upper eastern half, before heading west again, and home.

What I experienced on my 1,200-mile journey (six distinct day trips) across Vermont both astounded and delighted me.

I’ve often joked about Vermont as “The Shire,” with a nod to J.R.R. Tolkien’s popular Lord of the Rings trilogy. But seeing the state up close, the simile is made real. Nearly every single town I visited, even the most tiny or remote, exhibited that striking sense of collective organization for which Vermont is celebrated throughout the world: the town common/green, the community house and/or place of worship, the general store, the post office, and the local watering hole (sometimes all in the same building).

And Vermonters’ “live-and-let-live” tolerance, not to mention their good sense of humor, is also alive and well. On my journey, I talked with and listened to truck drivers, single moms, loggers, store owners, bankers, butchers, bakers, and deli sandwich makers – and always came away greatly enriched. Vermonters can be stubborn, yes, but they are also open to dialogue – and they can banter with the best of them.

Finally, the sheer physicality of the places I visited made a significant impression. In a 21st-century world that bows down before the Internet, the electronic screen, and the virtual, the Vermonters across our once-and-future republic that I witnessed were all actually doing things – growing their own food in even the smallest terraced hillside gardens, harvesting their own energy for winter (to see a home without a significant woodpile in process was a rare sight on my journey), and making the most of the land by “making hay while the sun shines,” as the old adage goes.

By the time my expedition ended, I was even more impressed with Vermont and Vermonters than when I started, and I couldn’t help but imagine a day when, despite the imminent collapse of “Petroleum Man” and the U.S. Empire, Vermont may very well land on its feet – with continued foresight, planning, hard work, and (of course) grace and good humor.

Oh yes.

I picked up 130 more locations for our news journal on my journey, bringing our total number of distribution venues across the state to 350. We list them all on our website at www.vtcommons.org. Click on the “town by town” button on our home page.

We can now reasonably claim to deliver our news journal within easy reach of every town and every citizen in Vermont.

Let the expanded conversation about Vermont independence continue.

We hope to hear from you in the weeks and months ahead.

Free Vermont!

Long live the UnTied States.

Rob Williams
Publisher

Contributors

Gaelan Brown serves Vermont Commons: Voices of Independence as its business manager and as a member of the editorial board. He blogs as “An Energy Optimist” at www.vtcommons.org.

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Ben Falk works with Whole Systems Design, LLC human habitats systems (sustaining buildings and landscapes) to be resilient in the face of peak oil, rapid climate changes, deepening economic insolvency, and other challenges emerging from these. He shares tools and techniques involved in this practice through Whole Systems Skills transition trainings. www.wholesystemsdesign.com.

Gary Flennohns teaches energy technology and policy at the University of Vermont.

The Greenneck loves heavy metal music, combustion motors, animals, and working the land. He lives in a self-built, solar-powered home in northern Vermont and may or may not be based on the life of Ben Hewitt, author of The Town That Food Saved and proprietor of benhewitt.net.

Will Lindner is a mandolin player, writer, and editor living in Barre. He serves as managing editor for Vermont Commons: Voices of Independence.

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: Voices of Independence. 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.

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


Jeb Wallace-Brodeur is a Vermont photographer and serves as staff photographer for The Times Argus newspaper of Barre and Montpelier.

Rob Williams, editor and publisher of Vermont Commons: Voices of Independence, is a teacher, historian, writer, musician and yak farmer living in the Mad River Valley.
Here’s one place that Vermont’s major political parties and news media can’t monopolize: the roadways. A Steele for Governor sign on Route 2 in Marshfield.

Vermont Commons welcomes your input. Please e-mail letters to editor@vtcommons.org or post to PO Box 1121, Waitsfield, Vermont 05673. Although we will try to print your letters in their entirety, we may edit to fit. Please be concise. Be sure to include your contact information (name, address, telephone, and e-mail) for verification purposes.

Letters to the Editor

THE CASE FOR RE-LEGALIZING CANNABIS

Editor, Vermont Commons:

Cannabis, hemp, a.k.a. marijuana, is the answer to our economic and environmental woes. Humankind has utilized this God-given plant for at least 10,000 years. It is in the Chinese pharmacopoeia dating back to 6400 BC. In America the first laws regarding hemp date back to the colony at Jamestown, where there were mandatory-grow laws for the survival of the colonists. Washington and Jefferson were premier hemp farmers in their time (under current federal law they could be executed!). Washington said “make the most of the indica hemp seed and sow it everywhere,” and Jefferson commented “always set aside one acre for hemp.”

Cannabis is the word the Greeks used. The Chinese called it ma, the English called it hemp, the French le chanvre, the Mexicans refer to it as mota. It wasn’t until the 1930s that William Randolph Hearst coined the word marijuana – out of economic and racist motives, as blacks and Hispanics used it more than whites.

Cannabis is the premier source for a variety of uses such as:

FOOD: It has more highly digestible protein than soybeans, making it a No. 1 source of food. It also provides gamma linolucleic acid—an essential fatty acid.

FUEL: It is the No. 1 source of biomass for energy. You could count [the No. 2 to No. 100] plants combined and it won’t equal the energy output of cannabis. If we planted just 6 percent of our arable land with hemp we could provide for 90 percent of our energy needs, with the rest coming from solar, wind, and small-scale hydro.

FIBER: It has more cellulose for paper making, textiles, and clothing than any other plant.

MEDICINE: It helps alleviate pain and suffering from a panoply of human illness, and is helpful in treating or preventing Alzheimer’s, cancer, AIDS, MS, epilepsy, migraine headaches, menstrual cramps, glaucoma, ileitis, chronic pain, and other conditions.

Cannabis also has 50,000 “green” industrial uses creating good-paying, non-outsourcable jobs in a “new” industry.

After 14 years of the Volstead Act and alcohol prohibition from 1919 to 1933, Americans came to their senses and realized that all prohibition does is create a black market with crime, corruption, and violence. In 1937, Harry Anslinger, who was in charge of alcohol prohibition, was out of a job. He conspired with Dupont (who invented nylon that year) when a decorticator, like Eli Whitney’s cotton gin, was created to cut hemp.
Most Likely to Secede, continued from page 1

involving war, militarism, territorial expansion, and immoral confiscation of escaped slaves. And Abraham Lincoln’s “War to Prevent Southern Secession” (as it’s sometimes called) linked this legitimate political concept forever to the South, slavery, and racism, largely erasing it from our 20th century cultural and historical memory.

These days, the concept of secession is deemed too radical – even treasonous – to be discussed in mainstream political, media and news circles.

Until now.

Secession, the “S” word, the dirtiest word in U.S. politics, is ready to re-enter U.S. political conversation as an old idea, rediscovered. The next big thing. Which is funny. Because secession is about smallness. Decentralization. Devolution, not revolution. And there are signs that Americans of all stripes are interested.

“Secession is the next radical idea poised to enter mainstream discourse – or at least the realm of the conceivable,” writes Bill Kaufman is his new book Bye Bye Miss American Empire: Neighborhood Patriots, Backcountry Rebels, and their Underdog Crusades to Redraw America’s Political Map. “The prospect of breaking away from a union once consecrated to liberty and justice but now degenerating into imperial putrefaction will only grow in appeal as we go marching with our PATRIOT Acts and National Security Strategies through Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and the frightful signposts on our road to nowhere.”

Secession’s signposts, meanwhile, are popping up all over the United States.

More than 30 of our 50 states in the U.S. Empire are home to active secessionist organizations.

During the past five years, the country has witnessed three national conferences organized around secession – the first (Burlington, Vermont, in 2006) and the third (Manchester, New Hampshire, in 2008) both taking place in New England. The second, held in Tennessee, produced a document called the Chattanooga Common, or, that the current average size of U.S. federal districts – a whopping 647,000 citizens. Or, that the current average size of citizens per representative, larger than the entire
population of the state of Vermont – creates any

in its citizens, but an uncontrollable Empire governed by an unholy alliance of transnational corporations and a U.S. government bought and paid for by the same.

Like blind men with the elephant, liberal and conservative critics alike recognize portions of this troubling reality. Blue Staters complain about Big Business and corporate personhood. Red States bear witness to Big Government excess and intrusion into the lives of ordinary citizens.

In truth, they are both right. The 21st-century United States is governed by neither a republican form of government, nor organized around a capitalist form of economic life. Instead, “fascism” rules the day, as defined by Il Duce himself, good Italian Benito Mussolini, who defined the term as “a monopolistic merger of Big Business and the power of the State.” “This left/right thing has got to go,” explains Vermont Commons: Voices of Independence co-founder and publisher emeritus Ian Baldwin. “We’re decentralists and we’re up against a monster.”

Sightings of the monster-in-question, the United States of Empire, have been reported by Project Censored for decades now (see www.projectcensored.org). On the domestic front, the news is deeply troubling. Of all western democracies, the United States stands near dead last in voter turnout, last in health care, last in education, highest in homicide rates, mortality, STDs among juveniles, youth pregnancy, abortion and divorce,” explains journalist Christopher Ketcham in a recent issue of GOOD magazine, summarizing his conversations with retired international businessman and Duke University economics professor emeritus Thomas Naylor, co-founder of the secessionist think tank the Second Vermont Republic. "The nation has trillions in deficits it can never repay, is beset by staggering income disparities, has destroyed its manufacturing base, and is the world’s most egregious polluter and greediest consumer of fossil fuels.” The nation is also inhabited by "some 40 million Americans living in poverty, tens of millions more in a category called ‘near poverty,’ and a permanent underclass trapped by a real unemployment rate of 17 percent.”

This depressing demographic data would be somewhat easier to confront if one assumed that the United States government is at all interested in solving the myriad problems that bedevil its citizens. Or, that the current average size of U.S. congressional districts – a whopping 647,000 citizens per representative, larger than the entire population of the state of Vermont – creates any sort of possibility for democratic discussion and representative government.

Instead, however, the evidence seems to indicate that Washington, D.C., has allied itself with large corporations to strip away both decision-making control and resources from ordinary Americans in almost every conceivable way. Libraries of books have been written on stupendous financial skull-duggery and Wall Street’s fleecing of Main Street, U.S. war-making and arms dealing globally, multinational corporations’ monopolistic control of our nation’s food and energy supply, massive electoral fraud, and the impending bankruptcy of the U.S. government, beholden to the Wall Street banksters, Goldman Sachs and their ilk, and the so-called Federal Reserve (which is neither).

To complicate matters even further, throw into this mix Peak Oil and global climate change, twin 21st-century sisters who are poised to clean planetary house and dramatically destabilize our world as we know it.

It is no wonder that the United States, in the throes of what Yale historian Paul Kennedy calls “imperial overstretch,” strives to maintain a policy of “full spectrum dominance” in an effort to control the world’s remaining easily recoverable fossil fuel energy reserves. Or that the United States seeks to bolster what retired policy analyst Chalmers Johnson calls a global “empire of bases” (as many as 1,000, by best estimates) in more than 130 countries around the world – the best defense is a good offense. Or that the United States promotes what former Wall Street financial analyst and Bush pere regulator Catherine Austin Fitts calls a “tapeworm economy,” in which small groups of large corporations make obscene amounts of money by blowing up stuff (and

“Secession, Not Aggression” – Purchase the new 2011 Vermont independence bumper stickers online at www.vtcommons.org/store. CURTIS SAVARD

2. WHY SECESSION: THE U.S. AS EMPIRE

Why nonviolent secession? Simply stated...

The United States is no longer a self-governing republic responsive to the needs and concerns
people – “collateral damage”), rebuilding what they’ve destroyed with taxpayer and borrowed money paid to “contractors,” and then privatizing once-publicly held assets (oil, and much more).

Look no further than the now-seven-year-old U.S. invasion of Iraq as a case study in how the “tapedworm economy” works.²³

In the face of what James Howard Kunstler called this “Long Emergency,” what options do we as Vermonters, as Americans, have? "The only ones I can envision are: denial, compliance, political reform, implosion, rebellion, and dissolution,” writes the Second Vermont Republic’s Thomas Naylor, in his 2008 book Secession: How Vermont and All the Other States Can Save Themselves from the Empire. In the passage below, Naylor briefly describes each of these options, and concludes that nonviolent secession “represents the only morally defensible response to the U.S. Empire.”

DENIAL: Most Americans – including our government, our politicians, corporate America, Wall Street, the Pentagon, and the media – are in complete denial of our perilous plight. In spite of all of our obvious problems, they seem oblivious to the cataclysmic risks we are facing. But, obviously, denial does not solve problems, and it seems clear that these problems will not simply vanish or solve themselves. So we reject this option.

COMPLIANCE: Many armchair environmentalists, pacifists, democratic socialists, and simple-living adherents are all too aware of the risks facing the Empire, but feel completely powerless at the feet of corporate America and the U.S. government to do anything about them. So they talk about how bad things are and they try to live their personal lives in positive ways, but in relation to our government they do nothing but naively hope for the best. For them the name of the game is compliance. Since that gets us nowhere, we reject this option, too.

REFORM: The real Pollyannas are liberal Democrats who believe that all we need do is elect the right Democrat president and all of our problems will be solved. They see political reform (such as campaign finance reform) as a panacea, failing to realize that so long as the Congress is controlled by corporate America there will never be any meaningful campaign finance reform. Since we have a single political party disguised as two, it matters not whether the president calls himself a Democrat or a Republican. The results will be the same. So, again, we reject this option.

IMPELSON: When Soviet Leader Mikhail S. Gorbachev came to power in 1985, who could have imagined that the Soviet Union would soon implode and cease to exist? The United States seems to be well on its way to replicating the experience of its former archenemy in an American setting. So, do we want to sit by and wait for that to happen? Again we reject this option.

SECESSION “represents the only morally defensible response to the U.S. Empire.” —Thomas Naylor

REBELLION: Just as armed rebellion gave birth to the United States in 1776, so too could some combination of stock market meltdown, economic depression, crippling unemployment, monetary crisis, skyrocketing crude oil prices, double-digit interest rates, soaring federal deficits and trade imbalances, curtailment of social services, repeated terrorist attacks, return of the military draft, or environmental catastrophe precipitate a violent 21st-century revolution against corporate America and the U.S. government. However, we also reject this option, because we are opposed to all forms of violence.

There is, then, just one viable option: peaceful dissolution. Also called “secession.”

This article appears in chapter form, in the new book Censored 2011, published this fall by Project Censored. Part II of this article will appear in the Stick Season 2010 (November/December) issue. Visit www.projectcensored.org to find out more about their important work.

Endnotes
3 For a state-by-state list of secession organizations, visit the Middlebury Institute at www.middleburyinstitute.net.
4 See www.middleburyinstitute.net for the complete text of the Chattanooga Declaration.
6 Kauffman, xx.
8 Visit www.vtcommons.org/essentialreadings for the books and resources we think most useful in understanding the U.S. as Empire.
9 Thomas Naylor, Secession: How Vermont and All the Other States Can Save Themselves from the Empire. (Port Townsend, Washington: Feral House, 2008, 43-44.
VT Independence Candidates, continued from page 1
the only way to end it is to remove ourselves from the beast.”

Other candidates are more circumspect.
"I'm not a secessionist but am sympathetic to the cause," says Todd Pritsky of Fletcher (Franklin County), who is running for a seat in the Vermont House of Representatives. "I view myself as a fellow traveler; I find common cause and common ground with the folks of the Second Vermont Republic, but I don't believe you're going to convince people about secession when they're more concerned with 'How am I going to feed my family and where's my healthcare going to come from?' Those are the more important issues and always will be.”

Gaelan Brown, of Fayston, is running for a Vermont Senate seat from Washington County. His views are similar to Pritsky’s.
"I'm not running on secession as a single issue," says Brown. "There are plenty of people in the secession movement doing that, and I applaud them for it. I'm running on Vermont's economic sustainability as a single issue. Secession has to be considered, but I also respect those who don't see it as the only solution and are focused on lower-level tactical challenges and opportunities."

Mostly, the candidates see Vermont independence – be it political independence, economic independence, energy and cultural independence, or all of these – as a process. And they see themselves moving that process forward.
"I am actively promoting what I see as the necessary mental preparation for independence by asking voters to consider declaring their individual independence from the evil of the federal government," says Wilmington resident Craig B. Hill, Vermont Senate candidate from Bennington County. "Before they can be enthusiastic about Vermont as an independent nation they must come to grips with dissolving their own, individual ties with the hopelessly evil and corrupt U.S. government, Only then can they take the next step, supporting nonviolent actions that will save our rights and improve our lives by declaring de facto independence."

The Current Lineup on the Campaign Trail
With such divergent viewpoints, can it be said that there is a distinct, identifiable "independence" movement and a unity of purpose among these candidates?

Yes, it can be said – both said and defended. As related in the Summer 2010 issue of Vermont Commons (Voices of Independence Emerge in Vermont Politics, available online at www.vtcommons.org), the state’s seven-year-old secessionist movement entered the realm of electoral politics this year when Second Vermont Republic founder Thomas Naylor persuaded Steele to pursue the governorship as a secessionist candidate. At the same time, there was another strand to the movement – the “Senate30” campaign, led by Dennis Morrisseau of West Pawlet. Morrisseau, whose political activism goes back to 1970s, envisioned a coordinated effort to post secessionist candidates for all 30 seats in the state senate; he put himself in the running for a Rutland County senate seat, and spread the word to other Second Vermont

Republic activists, hoping to round out the roster. Morrisseau contends that the legislative branch is the seat of true power in both the Vermont and federal systems, with more influence over political decisions than the executive branch.

Meanwhile, though, Naylor was recruiting Steele and Garritano for the high-profile executive offices. Morrisseau’s vision was further diluted when some candidates declared for the Vermont House rather than the Senate.
Eventually, a roster of independence candidates emerged, even though they are not lock-step in their vision of what independence means (fitting enough for people who define themselves as independents). That roster includes:

- Gaelan Brown, State Senate candidate from Washington County;
- Peter Garritano, Shelburne, candidate for lieutenant governor;
- Craig B. Hill, State Senate candidate from Bennington County;
- Steve Laible, State Senate candidate from Chittenden County;
- James Merriam, candidate for the Vermont House, Washington-3 District, from Montpelier;
- Dennis Morrisseau, State Senate candidate from Rutland County;
- Peter Moss, candidate for the Vermont Senate and the U.S. Senate from Fairfax (Franklin County);
- Todd Pritsky, candidate for the Vermont House from Fletcher (whose district combines areas of Fletcher, Fairfax, and St. Albans Town);
- Dennis Steele, Kirby, candidate for governor;
- Robert Wagner, State Senate candidate from Addison County.

(This list may not be complete, ‘independents’ being the unheraldable cats that they are. Readers can find position statements and introductions to these candidates online in the Vermont Commons Summer 2010 issue referenced above.)

Getting on the ballot was no mean feat for these candidates, given that the Legislature, near the end of its 2010 term, moved the traditional filing deadline forward by nearly two months, to late June. However, they obtained the requisite constituent signatures and met the other filing requirements, and are officially in the running. By the time August came around they were gaining experience and learning the lay of the electoral landscape – a significantly different one for candidates not labeled “Democrat,” “Republican,” or even “Progressive.” Yet, to varying extents, they had concluded that the landscape was indeed negotiable for them.

“It’s going well,” said Wagner, the Addison County senate candidate. “Trying to play an election by the rules of the establishment would indeed be an uphill battle. I don’t have the time or
the money for that; I’ve got a day job. But at the end of the day, this is Vermont, and you can reach out in person on an individual basis. If people like you they’ll vote for you.”

“It’s been really interesting,” said Brown (Senate, Washington County). “I’ve had lots of interesting conversations with people all through-out the political spectrum – left/right, red/blue. I feel like I’m having success and seeing heads nod about issues like the dysfunctional and corrupt federal government and states needing to stand up and make their own priorities and somehow move forward.”

Garritano pointed out that to some degree campaigns were static over the summer, waiting for the resolutions of the Democratic and Republican primary battles on August 24. It was especially true regarding the gubernatorial and lieutenant governor campaigns.

“I’m talking to people on a daily basis, but I’m not really doing much campaigning yet,” he said in early August. “I’m waiting for the primaries to see who I’m going to be facing – although I’m 90-percent sure that none of them are going to talk about the war, the PATRIOT Act, genocide in the Middle East, the corporate takeover, as long as they’re in bed with those same interests.”

Garritano got a dose of reality when he contacted Vermont Public Radio, seeking to participate in a candidates forum, and was refused. “They said it was only for candidates in the primary right now.” After the primaries, Garritano expects increased exposure as media outlets conform to the Federal Communications Commission’s Equal Time Rule, which obligates broadcast licensees to provide opportunities to diverse candidates who demand it.

Meanwhile, Garritano has been attending public events, partly to make his candidacy known. He spoke from the floor at a meeting on the proposal to base F-35 fighter jets in Burlington, and his comments were aired by the local Fox channel. (“There was also a [Burlington] Free Press reporter who was very enthusiastic and said he’d give me a call,” said Garritano. “He probably went back to the newsroom and got straightened out by the editor. I never heard from him again.”)

But despite their outsider status, the unresolved major-party primary battles, and Vermont’s traditional suspension of politics during the summer, the independence candidates have made inroads. Pritsky was mentioned along with the two incumbent candidates in his House race in an article in the St. Albans Messenger (“Maybe no one else had filed yet,” he speculated), and chatted for an hour with the host of "Shotgun Express," a political-
affairs program on Public Access TV.

“He called me up because of the article he’d seen in Vermont Commons,” said Pritsky, who has also made a habit of sending press releases to newspapers and media outlets. “Hey, Todd was at this forum on health care, and that forum on the economy,” he said, mimicking his press releases. “I’m actively campaigning, not just sitting back and letting things happen.”

In Washington County, Gaelan Brown has spoken to the Waterbury Rotary Club and has been invited to speak to the Waterbury Veterans’ Association. In Addison County, Wagner’s candidacy has attracted the attention of the Addison Independent, a weekly newspaper published in Middlebury. “They’ve given me and other independent candidates a fair shake,” he said.

Several candidates have found less-traditional means to elbow their way into the public dialogue. Pritsky has an active Facebook presence, which he uses for fundraising and spirited political discussion. Brown, who works for a Vermont-based solar energy company, writes for alternative-energy publications (and for Vermont Commons) and does not hesitate to let his readers know that he’s seeking election to the state Senate.

But the most notable success in leveraging public support to force his way into a structurally closed campaign system is Dennis Steele’s. At the start of his campaign he found himself excluded from events featuring the gubernatorial candidates (and was famously arrested in Barre when he tried to insert himself into a debate at the Old Labor Hall; the police later dropped the charges). When he began posting these exclusions on Facebook and Twitter and getting thousands of responses, forum sponsors started changing their minds.

“That tactic is working pretty well,” said Steele. He described one of what he said were several examples: A statewide organization of Lesbian and gay Vermonters denied him a place in a candidates debate; after he posted the information on Facebook, members of the organization were outraged.

“Even though a lot of them didn’t agree with me they wanted me to be heard,” he said. “So they’ve created a whole ‘nother debate for October 6 just because of the pressure that was put on them.”

The traditional media — print and broadcast — continue to wield power and influence in elections. But alternative candidates are finding alternative means for entry and exposure, the so-called “social networking sites.” As the 21st century gathers steam, newspapers and TV will ignore them at their own peril.

Rejecting a war economy

Tactics are one element in an election. Another one — supposedly the very heart of the matter — is policy. The independence candidates are not of one mind in the matter of secession and its immedia-cy in Vermont. But as a group they constitute the most unequivocal political voice in the state in the cause of peace and Vermont’s unilateral withdrawal from the wasteful and tragic military adventures the U.S. wages habitually around the globe.

“Vermont has the highest per-capita death rate from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan of any U.S. state,” says Wagner. “Talk about 9/11 and whether it was a false-flag operation is going to make people uncomfortable; I would rather talk about what the U.S. government did in response to 9/11. That’s damning enough. Vermont’s proportionate share of the cost of the wars is $1.5 billion a year, and Vermonters are out there dying for this – two major wars perpetrated on the flimsy excuse of 9/11. That’s what affects them directly. It becomes academic who did it.”

Pritsky and Brown tend to fold the enormity of the ongoing wars into a pattern of abuse and over-reaching by the federal government, and its effect upon states. Brown uses examples from his field of expertise, citing a recent ruling by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission that forbids states to give preferential rates, through feed-in tariffs, to renewable energy. Such programs are allowed by states to give preferential rates, through feed-in tariffs, to renewable energy. Such programs are already under contract, in Vermont and elsewhere.

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They want to change the political conversation, break through the barriers, and help Vermonters contemplate the previously unthinkable premise of independence.
VT Independence Candidates, continued from page 7

sustainability and how both of those perspectives
can work toward a stronger Vermont economy. I
think that’s where I’m seeing heads nod.”

Yet Steele and Garritano – the candidates who
take the strongest pro-secession positions – are
most direct in their condemnation of the wars
and their effect upon Vermont.

“Most people are scared to say anything bad
about the military,” said Garritano. “The catch-
word these days [for political candidates] is to
say ‘I’m fiscally conservative and socially liberal.’
Yeah? If you want to be ‘fiscally conservative’ let’s
bring the troops home and close the bases around
the world. I keep stressing the total incompetence
of the military. They don’t do anything well. If it
were any other business they would be bankrupt.”

Nor does Garritano shrink before the loaded
question of whether he “supports the troops.”

“I say I don’t support anybody invading another
country. I don’t support anybody killing anybody.
When we go over there people take orders and
do horrible things.” He’s certain that the main-
stream candidates, once selected by the prima-
ries, will not speak so unequivocally about the
“sacred” U.S. military.

Steele agrees. He participated in a debate in
Brattleboro in which Democratic gubernatorial
candidate Peter Shumlin outlined a plank of his
fiscal plan for Vermont.

“His idea was for us to save $40 million by
taking all the low-risk offenders out of the prison
system,” said Steele. “When it was my turn I said,
“That’s chump change when you’re talking about
the military budget.’ If we weren’t spending that
$1.5 billion on the wars we could put it into educa-
tion, agriculture, and our other critical needs at
home. Our kids.

“This is about moral authority. I think that’s the
jugular vein, and that’s what we have to go after.”

Steele believes Republican candidate Brian
Dubie will seek to bring the U.S. drone
program to Vermont – installing pilots, who
guide the drones electronically from comfort-
able, air-conditioned buildings stateside as they
bomb targets in Afghanistan and Pakistan. He
condemns Vermont’s U.S. senators, Patrick Leahy
and Bernie Sanders, for securing military-related
contracts to boost Vermont’s economy.

“Are we going to send our Vermont military
off to fight overseas so our people in Vermont
are going to have jobs?” asks Steele (a service
veteran himself). “What’s the morality of killing
around the world so that we can maintain our
economy?”

Reckoning the odds, short term and long

Do the independence candidates think they can
win in November?

Pritsky believes he has a decent chance in a five-
person race for two House seats. Wagner says he’s
working more for Steele and Garritano than for
himself. “The statewide candidates can’t knock
on every door in Vermont, and I’m better at blow-
ing somebody else’s horn than my own. I consider
that a little distasteful.”

Mainly, they believe they’re laying the ground-
work for the future.

“I intend to run again in 2012 and again in 2014,”
says Brown. “If it doesn’t reach a critical mass this
year, that’s fine. I’ll build on that.”

Steele, the most high-profile of the candidates,
hopes to get voters more comfortable with the
concept of secession, and felt he scored a victory
recently when the Newport Daily Express printed
the following headline: “Five Dems and One
Secessionist Vie For Votes in Governor’s Debate.”

“People are going to be talking about seces-
sion all over Newport,” said Steele. “I’m trying
to plant the idea so it’s no longer a taboo thing. I
see myself cleaning the path so that other candi-
dates will be able to run on it in the future. And
it’s working.”

In Bennington County, Craig Hill admits that
he does not sense much movement toward seces-
sion and independence yet.

“I have been nonplussing the electorate, draw-
ing blank stares,” he says. Voters there helped
elect President Barack Obama, and Hill says they
want him to succeed. Despite the many ways that
his policies continue along the odious path forged
by George W. Bush. “It seems they won’t be able
to exhale until January 20, 2017, when Obama
leaves office,” he says. “Everything else for them
politically simmers on a distant back burner.”

Yet Hill, like the others, is philosophical, know-
ing that the concept of separating from the U.S.
Empire will take time to germinate. For historical
reference, he points out, “Rome wasn’t disman-
tled in a day.” •
Two superb Vermont authors have recently published important books describing the transition to a decentralized, post-carbon society. Bill McKibben, the internationally known climate-change journalist and activist, and Ben Hewitt, a gifted young writer firmly rooted in his land and community, explore complementary aspects of the massive cultural shift that lies before us. McKibben sketches the big picture – dramatic alterations in the planet’s climate and ecological systems – while Hewitt focuses in on the fine details of life in a rural community (Hardwick, Vermont) that is reinventing its agricultural economy. McKibben, too, cites Hardwick as an example of the adaptations required to inhabit the changed earth and wrote an endorsement for Hewitt’s book. The impending collapse of the industrial system looms in the background of both works.

McKibben reminds his readers that all this is happening because the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has surpassed 350 parts per million, the level that climate scientists have determined to be the tipping point for trapping excessive heat. Writing around the time of the failed Copenhagen conference on climate change, he reviews the political and economic forces that inhibit any sensible response to this crisis; an entrenched paradigm of endless growth, plus an enormous investment in the existing infrastructure, have paralyzed modern nations from taking effective action to reduce carbon emissions, so the proportion of CO₂ in the atmosphere continues to rise. Add in the reality of Peak Oil (the dramatic end of cheap energy that made industrial civilization possible), observes McKibben, and it is clear that our civilization is in deep trouble: “the system has met its match.”

Yet even after pronouncing this austere diagnosis, McKibben maintains that we “can build durable and even relatively graceful ways to inhabit this new planet.” He refuses to “obsess” over the dangers of societal collapse and calls for creative strategies to “manage our descent” into a lifestyle of less consumption and complexity. The cultural phase of growth must be followed by a phase of maturity, where we value what is durable, stable, and hardy rather than what is fast and flashy. Above all, we will need to stop pursuing bigness and learn to appreciate a smaller, more local scale. McKibben then launches into a remarkable 23-page reflection on “the biggest object of them all: the United States itself.” In these pages, he touches upon the core concerns of Vermont Commons and the Vermont secession movement, though he comes to a somewhat different conclusion.

First, McKibben discusses the ongoing tension from the beginning of American history between a Jeffersonian, anti-imperial radical democracy, and a Hamiltonian nationalism that has sought to concentrate political and economic power. He argues that nationalism has prevailed for two centuries because the U.S. pursued a series of “national projects,” from canal and railroad building to the Cold War and space program, that required enormous resources. “Jefferson couldn’t build the highways,” he comments.

Whether or not this is true, and whether or not a more Jeffersonian, decentralized society could have avoided the pitfalls of reckless industrialization and empire without sinking into a reactionary agrarianism, the deed is done. Now, however, conditions on planet Eaarth make large, ambitious projects ever-less viable; resources become prohibitively expensive, and we can no longer

While neither of these authors would be classified as “doomers” (à la Michael Ruppert or James Howard Kunstler) or anarcho-primitivists like Derrick Jensen, they see that big changes are on the horizon. They chart a possible course toward a more sustainable and participatory society that might replace the current technocracy. While they grapple with the difficulties of this transition, both of these authors offer hopeful visions of the future.

Eaarth

The strange title of Bill McKibben’s book is meant to be provocative, for he is making a jolting argument: we no longer live on the Earth that we have known throughout human history. As of now, we inhabit a different planet, and we will be forced to live differently. “We may, with commitment and luck, yet be able to maintain a planet that will sustain some kind of civilization,” he writes (all italics in quotations are his), “but it won’t be the same planet, and hence it can’t be the same civilization. . . . We simply can’t live on the new earth as if it were the old earth; we’ve foreclosed that option.” Our new planet, “Eaarth,” is one with far less biotic abundance and diversity, an impoverished and fragile place.

Marshalling extensive data from numerous sources and illustrative anecdotes, McKibben serves up a methodical, disturbing catalog of the profound effects of climate change: from now on, life conditions on this planet will be more severe and chaotic; there will be more extremes of temperature, more floods, more droughts, more destructive storms, more (and larger) forest fires, more crop failures and food shortages. Insects, viruses and diseases will spread disruptively; the melting away of glaciers threatens water supplies for millions of people; the oceans are rising, warming, and becoming more acidic. And so forth. McKibben explains that climate change is taking off more rapidly and severely than expected because of the complex interdependencies among planetary systems; each alteration triggers or reinforces others.

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continued on page 10
Free Vermont Media, continued from page 9

afford the waste and complexity that massive projects involve. The work of survival on this less-hospitable planet “needs to be done close to home. Small, not big; dispersed, not centralized.”

The entire second half of Eaarth describes strategies – from Transition Town initiatives to local currencies and banks to “the new agriculture” – that tend toward resilient local communities, living in ecological balance. “The project we’re now undertaking – maintenance, graceful decline, hunkering down, holding on against the storm – requires a different scale.” That is precisely what we at Vermont Commons have been saying all along, and McKibben affirms that because of Vermont’s unique streak of local self-reliance, it “may be one of the best places in the world to think about the scale of the future.”

Bill McKibben has not embraced the Vermont secession movement, however, and he actually makes it a point in this book to explain why. He finds us too far out on the fringe, “forever holding conferences with southern diehards who can’t wait to return to the old Confederacy,” aligned with Sarah Palin’s friends or the “sorehead” governor of Texas, and too receptive to conspiracy theories. It is true that some members of our circle have explored common interests with other groups that oppose the continuing spread of the American empire, and it is reasonable for any progressive person (which includes most Vermont secessionists, by the way) to be suspicious of those groups’ more reactionary agendas. But advocates for Vermont independence are not “forever” hanging out with reactionaries; most of our thinking and effort, in fact, are devoted to the very goal that McKibben explicitly endorses: “functional independence,” figuring out “how Vermont might one day grow more of its own food and provide more of its own energy…” We know that secession alone is not the answer to climate change; Vermont can never be a secure island on a disintegrating Eaarth. But some of us are convinced that the culture of endless growth, centralization, and technocracy is so deeply embodied by our national government that Vermont can never truly implement (not just “think about”) “the scale of the future” while we are subject to its rule.

Asking hard questions about the insidious (conspiratorial or not) power of an imperious national government, and raising the possibility of political secession, reflect the same awareness of our transitional times that McKibben eloquently describes in this book. McKibben does not see it this way; he thinks we can pursue localization while accepting federal authority for all the “good” things it does (such as protecting civil rights and wilderness areas). “When my town flooded, federal money helped,” he notes. Well, sure, but the one who pays the piper calls the tune, and many of the tunes chosen by the federal government are enormously destructive. How can we be functionally independent while we are financially and politically dependent?

Eaarth is an informative, provocative work that will get many, many people thinking about the severity of the challenge before us, and it offers an encouraging portrait of a more ecologically balanced society. Still, because McKibben is reluctant to consider the prospect of complete systemic collapse or the radical political strategies that might be needed to achieve genuine localization, I did not find his scenario to be completely convincing. After demonstrating just how serious are the impending horrors of climate chaos, McKibben’s picture of a “graceful” transition seemed unrealistically cheerful. The transition from corporate/technocratic/consumerist culture to a simpler, locally rooted way of living will require a profound and wrenching shift in our worldview. We need to be prepared for a radical break from the civilization that has destroyed Earth, and this is why the doomers, primitivists,
secessionists, and conspiracy ponderers speak to our present condition. They dare us to think outside the box of modern culture, not hold onto it merely because it is familiar and comfortable.

McKibben recognizes how difficult this shift will be, at one point admitting that modern people, who are conditioned to seek novel and diverse experience, will find local life parochial, limited and boring. But rather than critique the worldview that makes consumerist expectations seem normal, he suggests that we can critique the transition to simplicity by using the Internet to provide substitute experiences of novelty and variety. What a disappointing non sequitur! If life conditions on Earth prove to be as unforgiving as he insists they will be, there will be little margin for self-indulgent novelty. As long as people remain entranced by the worldview of growth and self-gratification, they will not embrace a “mature” civilization that values balance, sobriety, and self-restraint. I think McKibben gets this, but he seems unwilling to challenge his readers to step fully out of this worldview.

Meanwhile, through, we can fully support initiatives, such as those McKibben describes, that move our culture in the direction of local scale and modest consumption. Ben Hewitt’s book provides a detailed account of this process.

**The Town that Food Saved**

“When we feed ourselves, we become unconquerable.”

---gardening author

Eliot Coleman, to Ben Hewitt

Food is a logical rallying point for the localization movement. Agriculture is the most fundamental of all economic activities, because food is essential to life. Food self-sufficiency, as Eliot Coleman (and Thomas Jefferson long before him) suggested, is the basis for independence. The corporate centralization of our food system has turned us into passive, unskilled consumers, utterly dependent on the money economy and on the availability of cheap oil. In The Town that Food Saved, Ben Hewitt explains why this system is on the verge of breakdown, arguing that “our nation’s food supply has never been more vulnerable. And we, as consumers of food, share that vulnerability, having slowly, inexorably relinquished control over the very thing that’s most critical to our survival.”

The Town that Food Saved considers the economic and social dimensions of re-localizing our food system. Hewitt, the popular “Greenneck” columnist for Vermont Commons, spent many weeks exploring the dynamic agricultural enterprises emerging around Hardwick, Vermont – successful young businesses such as High Mowing Seeds, Pete’s Greens, Jasper Hill Farm, Vermont Soy and others that have attracted national attention. Persistently inquisitive and thoughtful, Hewitt provides a balanced, carefully nuanced study of the community. While the emerging local food system is widely praised and “feels right,” Hewitt wants to know why it is right. Questioning simplistic assumptions, he asks “What should a decentralized food system look like?” and examines the ironies and controversies that lurk below the

media hype of the Hardwick phenomenon. For example, if the economics of small-scale production lead to high-priced specialty products beyond the reach of a working class town’s citizens, can the system still be called “local?”

Hewitt gives readers an unusually intimate look at the people involved – the “agrepreneurs” who have become media celebrities, as well as farmers whose families have grown food in this community for generations, and back-road homeesteaders who have lived off the land for decades – because this is his own community and he knows these people well. The information he gained from extensive interviews is spiced with wry and candid observations of their habits and attitudes. Hewitt is a thorough and careful researcher who gives us serious sociological insights, yet he is also an engaging writer who fills this book with delightful wit and humor.

Hewitt places the quirky stories of Hardwick’s people into the larger context of an economically strained community trying to gain independence from the corporate system. This is the most significant story Hewitt tells. He explains how industrial food appears to be cheap because so many production and distribution costs are externalized – that is, they are paid for by degraded soil and compromised nutritional value, and by taxpayers in the form of subsidies to agribusiness and oil companies, rather than directly by consumers. As well, there are economies of scale to centralized production – and Hewitt gives a good bit of attention to the problem of defining appropriate scale – but at least a local economy is circular, and profits stay within the community. One of the keys to Hardwick’s success, writes Hewitt, is that its diverse agricultural businesses form a complete loop from seed gathering to planting and harvesting to compost. The system is relatively self-contained.

When the centralized economy implodes, due to resource depletion, ecological collapse and financial chaos, this model of local self-sufficiency will prove to be vitally important. “If ever the chemicals and petroleum stop flowing, we will go hungry; we simply can’t have 1 person feeding 140 of us without these inputs... Chemical fertilizers and petroleum are to agriculture what easy credit was to the housing market, and we all know how that turned out.” We will pay more for food, but as Hewitt suggests, we will be paying what this essential commodity is truly worth.

There is a political dimension to Hewitt’s analysis, though for the most part he understates it. At one point, echoing the theme Eliot Coleman sounded, he asserts that “there’s a bit of revolutionary lurking in every small-scale farmer,” but he does not explicitly define the revolutionary politics of localization. This, I think, is what he
This continues and ongoing series of Vermont Commons articles exploring how Vermont might generate much-needed revenue AND protect our commons in this new century. Part 1 of Gary Flomenhoft's latest contribution ran in our Summer 2010 (July/August) issue. Flomenhoft wrote: “Of all the common assets that have been privatized, arguably the most damaging and fundamental is the U.S. government’s constitutional power to create money.” It is available online at www.vtcommons.org/journal.

Short of nonviolent secession and the re-invention of Vermont as an independent republic, how might Vermont take back the unconstitutional money-issuing power of the Federal Reserve? The U.S. constitution in Article 1, Section 10, states:

“No State shall enter into any Treaty, Alliance, or Confederation; grant Letters of Marque and Repriusal; coin Money; emit Bills of Credit; make any Thing but gold and silver Coin a Tender in Payment of Debts; pass any Bill of Attainder, ex post facto Law, or Law impairing the Obligation of Contracts, or grant any Title of Nobility.”

That would seem to settle it, wouldn’t it? No coining of money or emitting bills of credit by the states. (I assume that the requirement for gold and silver has been superseded by the courts.) Let’s say you are not a secessionist or a Tenth Amendment rebel claiming sovereignty of the states. There are still several steps that can be taken short of political independence and creating a state currency. They include:

Creating local and state complementary currencies;  
Moving state tax and pension fund money from Wall Street to Vermont banks;  
Sharing bank interest with the public;  
Creating state and municipal banks;  
Speculation fees on short-term financial transactions.

Let’s go through them one at a time. But first it is necessary to understand how banks create money in the first place.

Most people think that banks take your savings and checking deposits and loan them out. This is what is described in classical economic textbooks: Investment equals savings; people save money and then it is loaned out for homes, business, and other enterprises. In actuality the banking system creates many times the amount on deposit in a system called “fractional reserve banking.” The amount created follows a mathematical formula of \( 1/R \), where \( R \) equals the reserve rate. So if the reserve requirement is 5 percent, then \( 1/0.05 = 20 \).

The banking system creates 20 times the amount of money on deposit at a reserve rate of 5 percent. This stems from the historical process gold-smiths used to loan out credit for many times the value of gold held in their vaults, and it was due to the fact that only a fraction of their loans came back to be redeemed in gold at any one time. So they only had to have a portion of the money loaned out on hand in gold. Likewise banks only need a fraction of the money loaned out on hand at any given time to satisfy demands for cash. The exception is during a “bank run” when people lose confidence in banks and everyone tries to withdraw their savings. Thus we need the FDIC.

In the 1920s many leading economists called for 100-percent reserve requirements, which would end bank creation of money. In recent years this has been considered economic heresy, but after the financial crisis, calls are being heard again for elimination of fractional reserve banking. By contrast, Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke has recently called for elimination of reserve requirements entirely, essentially calling for zero-percent reserve requirements, presumably due to the lack of credit currently available. (Gotta pay those bonuses, don’t ya know?) 

With 100-percent reserve requirements, how would banks operate? They could only loan out money on deposit, and that money would not be available for withdrawal. Currently money on deposit in savings or checking accounts can be withdrawn at any time. If the bank has $20 million dollars out on loan, at 5-percent reserve requirements the bank only needs $1 million on deposit to satisfy reserves. Some say banks now don’t even need deposits and base loans on bank assets, rather than deposits. But if you deposit $105 in the bank in a checking account and the bank lends out $100 and keeps $5 on reserve, you can still get your $105 back at any time. You have $105 in your bank account, and the person who got the loan has $100 in theirs created by an accounting entry. So there is now $205 based on the $105 you originally deposited. At 5-percent reserve, this multiplies to \( 1/R \times 105 \), or \$2,100, as borrowers spend their loans and the people they pay for products and services redeposit this money in other banks. This process is explained in any macroeconomics book.

With 100-percent reserve requirements this trick no longer works. For every $100 loaned out there has to be $100 on deposit backing it up. This means that your deposit would be like what is now a certificate of deposit (CD). You could not withdraw the money until the term of the certificate expires. Since banks borrow money on short terms and usually loan it on long terms, there would have to be a continual supply of people depositing their savings to provide enough capital for bank loans. Imagine Americans saving money! Banks would no longer create money, but simply act as intermediaries between savers and borrowers, as in classical economic theory, and collect the difference in interest as their fee.

As a result, the job of money creation would revert back to government, as it was in the colonies with scrip or bills of credit, under Lincoln when he issued Greenbacks, or JFK’s Treasury notes. (Note that Jackson, Lincoln, and JFK were all subject to assassination attempts, two of three successful.) Money could be issued at the federal, state, or local level.

Much debate currently goes on about this question, but the discussion is based on one fundamental agreement: Money should be a public utility for the benefit of the people, not a private tool of banks to collect interest payments. In the colonies government money was most successful when spent and loaned at low interest into the economy. The spending allowed governments to create public goods and services, and the loans allowed the money to be returned to the government and prevent inflation. Money could even be issued as an unconditional basic income to everyone.

Complementary currencies

Many experiments have been done with complementary currencies, both nationally and internationally, and they have been ruled legal by the courts. Several articles have appeared in Vermont Commons about them, so I won’t spend much time on it except to say that they arise historically when the national currency is in distress, and they are often short-lived. Experiments in local currency have generally not been that successful, but a small cadre of activists keeps these experiments alive, such as time-dollars, Ithaca Hours, Burlington Bread, Liberty Dollars, etc. The most successful and long-lived complementary currency is the Swiss Wir Bank, a business mutual credit clearing system operating without physical currency notes. For extensive reading on complementary currencies read Tom Greco or other writers on this topic. See Greco’s blog.
Creating state and municipal banks

One state that emerged with minimal damage from the financial crisis is the state of North Dakota. In the early part of the 20th century, North Dakota farmers were squeezed financially by out-of-state bankers. Determined to avoid this loss of autonomy in the future, the state legislature created the Bank of North Dakota in 1919. All state funds and funds of state institutions are deposited with the Bank of North Dakota, as required by law. The Bank administers several lending programs that promote agriculture, commerce and industry in North Dakota.

Vermont would be well advised to follow North Dakota’s example and consider forming a Vermont Sovereign State Bank. In the case of a crisis due to the declining value of the U.S. dollar, the state bank would be in a position to create bills of credit or state currency to maintain the operation of the state economy and state government. Both Jim Hogue and I testified on separate occasions this year to the Vermont House Committee on Ways and Means about creating a state bank. Bankers attended Hogue’s session and opposed the idea on grounds that it was competition.

Speculation fees

Arguably financial speculation was the cause of the financial collapse of 2008. Mortgage-backed securities are all based on another privatized common asset, which is the publicly created value of land. Landowners and speculators are able to retain the unearned increase in land values as the real estate bubble inflates. This creates a massive asset bubble, and irrational exuberance follows, except that real estate collapses every 18 years. Try telling that to the 70 percent of people who own their own homes and used their equity as an ATM machine for the last 10 years.

Due to the financial crisis, there is considerable discussion of financial speculation taxes both at the national and international level. Former British Prime Minister Gordon Brown and PM Nicolas Sarkozy of France have both proposed an international speculation tax of 0.25 percent. In the U.S. Congress, Rep. Peter DeFazio and Sen. Tom Harkin have proposed a bill called “Let Wall Street Pay for Wall Street’s Bailout Act of 2009,” also based on a rate of 0.25 percent. If these measures do not pass, Vermont could consider a state financial-speculation tax. The disadvantage of a federal tax is that Vermont does not receive any of the revenue.

Capital gains taxes do not differentiate between productive investments in goods and services and gambling in financial securities or real estate. It would be beneficial to exempt the job-producing investments from capital gains taxes and maintain them fully on speculative investments. Exemptions could include entrepreneurs, venture capital and angel funds, investments in IPOs and new stock offerings, small business loans, housing construction, or any other productive investment, and not a paper profit with no equivalent good or service provided. These productive investments could also be exempted from any speculation tax imposed. During the 2010 legislative session, the capital gains exemption for business continued on page 14.


Moving state tax and pension fund money from Wall Street to Vermont banks

A mass effort called “Move your Money” is being organized by Arianna Huffington and Rob Johnson to promote the idea of moving your money from Wall Street to banks in your home state and town. http://moveyourmoney.info/. A short film on the topic was made by Vermonter Eugene Jarecki based on the classic “It’s a Wonderful Life”. See it here: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/arianna-huffington/move-your-money-a-new-yea_b_406022.html

New Mexico’s House of Representatives voted in February, 65-0, to move their state money to local credit unions and community banks. Both Jim Hogue and I testified on separate occasions this year to the Vermont House Committee on Ways and Means about moving our money out of Wall Street. As far as I know the Legislature ignored this information and has done nothing to ask Treasurer Jeb Spaulding to move Vermont state money out of Wall Street.

Sharing bank interest with the public

The monetary system is a socially created system, which has been almost completely privatized by the Federal Reserve Banks. In 2008 a comprehensive study of revenue from common assets was done by the Green Tax and Common Assets Project. It can be found under documents at: http://www.uvm.edu/giee/?Page=research/greentax/commonassets.html. For this study, creation of money and speculation were briefly assessed for revenue potential.

As long as money creation has been privatized shouldn’t banks pay us a fee for granting them the privilege of creating money? The total bank loans in Vermont in 2009 appear to be $3,884,680,000, or $3.884 billion, according to FDIC statistics. An (arbitrary) 1-percent tax on bank money creation would generate $38.84 million of public revenue in Vermont.
Beating Wall Street, continued from page 13

ness was restored, but not for stocks and bonds, following the principle stated here, much to the credit of the Legislature.

Of all the financial transactions that take place internationally, it is estimated that 95 percent are speculation in paper assets only, and only 5 percent in actual goods and services. Economist James Tobin suggested a tax (Tobin Tax) to slow down the rate of speculation, which creates no new goods or services. Financial markets and regulatory bodies that monitor them are socially created assets that allow financial transactions to take place. Therefore the public deserves a share of the money generated in these markets.

In 2000, economist Dean Baker of the Center for Economic and Policy Research calculated the revenue potential of a 0.25-percent Tobin Tax for the United States. Applying this revenue on a per capita basis would have generated $268 million in Vermont in 2000.

Vermont independent monetary policy

The banking system has come under increasing scrutiny due to the financial collapse of 2008. Serious questions have been raised about the wisdom of the Wall Street bailout, which was opposed by 600:1 prior to approval. The Troubled Assets Relief Program (TARP) and other taxpayer bailouts may represent the largest transfer of public money to private hands in U.S. history. The federal government is simultaneously increasing the debt on a massive scale to fight two unconstitutional wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Since the federal government has taken on the debt of Wall Street’s derivatives and other exotic financial gambling mechanisms, the solvency of the federal government is in question. If China and other U.S. creditors decided to dump the dollar, there would be a massive devaluation of the currency and resulting loss of buying power, most likely followed by hyperinflation.

If the U.S. federal government is creating unsustainable debt, and has unconstitutionally transferred the money-creating power to the private banking system, then hasn’t the federal government relinquished its claim to legitimacy on the issuance of money? In nullifying the constitutional requirement for Congress to issue money, doesn’t this simultaneously nullify the restriction on states “coining money, or emitting bills of credit”?

Maybe it’s time Vermont implemented its own monetary system, if for no other reason than to prepare for the collapse of the federal system. If Vermont wants to seek economic and political independence, then independent monetary policy as outlined above is a good place to start. We all know the Golden Rule: “He who has the gold, makes the rules.”

References

Barnes, Peter, Capitalism 3.0, Berrett-Koehler Publishers; November 1, 2006.


Wiki quote-Andrew Jackson
http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Andrew_Jackson

If you deposit $105 in a checking account and the bank loans out $100 and keeps $5 on reserve, you can still get your $105 back at any time. You have $105 in your bank account, and the person who got the loan has $100 in theirs created by an accounting entry. So there is now $205 based on the $105 you originally deposited.

“ If we don’t have it, you don’t need it.”

DeBanville’s General Store
Bliss Village Store/Bradford
Dan and Whit’s General Store
Powers Market/North Bennington
Snowsville General Store
Sam Frank Inc. (Rutland)

ASSOCIATE MEMBER Vermont Commons: Voices of Independence
Vermont Alliance of Independent Country Stores www.viacs.org
It’s common knowledge among farmers and gardeners that compost heaps get warm, often warm enough to melt all the snow that falls on them. And over the years, many Vermont barns have actually burned because of hay or corn silage that had the right conditions (a lot of moisture) to cause the bacterial digestion process (composting) to get hot enough to spontaneously combust the material around it.

None of this is really news, right? Here’s the news: It is possible to heat your house and all your domestic hot water by capturing heat from a composting mound of biomass in your yard, without burning anything. And we actually built a working prototype of a “Pain Mound” at my house last autumn, which a year later continues to generate 110-plus-degree water from the waterlines we buried inside it. I can get more than 700 gallons of 110-degree water per day from this system.

Like many innovations, this concept is based on old knowledge revived. More than 30 years ago a French farmer named Jean Pain figured out how to generate hot water and methane from a specially designed mound of composting wood shreds. His goal was to build up the soils of his farm with effective composting, but he was also able to power his entire farm and home from the methane (natural gas) and the hot water that he collected as he made his innovative compost out of shredded woody biomass.

All of this energy came without burning anything, using a local, abundant, renewable resource, and the byproduct at the end: high-yield, soil-building compost.

The “Jean Pain Method” is a two-part concept. Heat is generated from the anaerobic digestion of a specially designed mound of soaked wood shreds (mulch). The heat is collected by passing water through the pipes that are coiled through the inside of the mound. There is also a sealed inner-chamber placed in the center of the mound as it is being built, which is then filled with a manure-slurry, sealed and used to generate methane-gas.

The heat from the mound creates the ideal conditions for methane production inside the sealed inner barrel. Jean Pain pumped the methane out of the inner barrel through a tube in the top, and compressed and stored it to be used later. He and his wife, Ida, captured enough natural gas to fuel all of their farm equipment, vehicles, and a generator (the engines having been converted to natural gas), as well as all of their gas for household cooking.

Jean kept careful records regarding the amount of fuel it took to harvest and shred all the brush to create each of his mounds. He claimed that his energy-return-on-energy-invested (EROEI) was more than 85 percent, meaning that if he spent the equivalent of 15 gallons of gasoline to run his truck, chainsaws, and chipper to produce the shredded biomass, he would get the energy equivalent of 85 gallons of gasoline as a result (energy from the hot water and the methane).

Aside from achieving energy self-sufficiency, Jean and Ida wrote a book and had a few years of fanfare in Europe based on the strong crop-yield results achieved with compost made this way. This composting concept defies conventional thinking that compost must be created with a lot of nitrogen-rich material mixed in. He proved that low-nitrogen woody biomass can make exceptional compost when it is fully digested by bacteria in this way. Oh, and by the way, you can heat and power your entire home too. Sadly, in the early 1980s Jean died, cheap oil came back, and like other sustainability solutions of the era, the “Jean Pain Method” seems to have withered on the vine.

About a year ago, Ben Falk (Vermont Commons’ “Homestead Security” columnist, who I hope the continued on page 16
have a large amount of hot water on hand. To get rid of the cold in the basement during Vermont winter and a home with average insulation, we figured out how to coil 400 feet of 1-inch waterline inside a large mound of soaked/packed wood chips. It worked! The buried water loop – going from our basement, to our mound, and back to the household plumbing – could bring our 48-degree well water up to 110-plus degrees, at about one-half a gallon per minute, continuously.

A couple of days after we completed our mound, its interior had heated up to 90-plus degrees. Within 10 days it reached 110-plus degrees. The woodchip mound we built was 14 feet wide at the base and eight feet tall. I can still get half a gallon per minute of 110-115-degree water continuously, 24/7, without the mound cooling off. This equates to more than 700 gallons per day of virtually free hot water. This flow rate, if maintained in the winter, could generate enough Btu-value to heat about 1,000 square feet with a radiant-floor heating system, since radiant-floor systems work best with a slow but steady flow rate and temperature of 110-120 degrees. This is assuming an average Vermont winter and a home with average insulation, according to several radiant-floor experts I spoke with. It would be simple to set up a few storage tanks in the basement, and circulate water through the mound at a slow but constant rate into the tanks, ensuring that we would always have a large amount of hot water on hand.

We did place a 50-gallon drum in the middle of the mound as a potential methane chamber, but we never loaded it with manure. I wasn’t comfortable experimenting with natural gas, and we were more focused on making hot water.

The internal temperature of our mound held steady for the first five months, but then we learned why Jean Pain insisted that it was essential to use finely shredded material (mulch) as opposed to the 1-inch-diameter woodchips that we used. Woodchips don’t have enough surface area for the bacteria to sustain a high level of activity. So after four or five months and winter weather kicked in, the digestion process in our mound slowed down and it cooled to 65 degrees by the spring. By early summer the temperature was back up to 115-degrees. Jean Pain had several documented successes using finely shredded mulch in which the temperature held steady at 130-plus degrees for between 18 and 24 months. That means one mound the size of ours could provide two winters’ worth of heat and hot water, replacing around $5,000 worth of fuel cost.

Pain Mounds can also include a sealed container holding manure; heated by the decomposition process, the manure produces methane gas, which can be captured, compressed, and used for fuel.

GAELAN BROWN

An annual $100 co-op membership earns you:

- A “Freedom and Unity” 50 Clover silver token (one ounce of .999 fine silver), featuring the Vermont independence flag on the front, and the likeness of Vermont homesteader and political activist Scott Nearing on the back.
- A one year subscription (6 issues) to Vermont Commons: Voices of Independence news journal.
- A Vermont Republic commemorative passport, featuring the 18th century woodcut image of an original Vermont republic coin on the front, and the Vermont independence flag on the back.
- A FREE 100 character classified advertisement in each of six issues of Vermont Commons: Voices of Independence news journal.

Help support Vermont independence.

Mail your $100 check made out to:

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Waitsfield, Vermont 05673

Or, join our cooperative online in seconds at http://www.vtcommons.org.

Free Vermont, and long live the UNtied States.
A founding father and mother of Transition visited Vermont in July.

The world’s first Transition Town grew up in Totnes, UK, when Rob Hopkins, Naresh Giangrande, Sophy Banks, and others met and discussed how to prepare for a time of diminishing fossil fuel supplies and climate change. Later, they added the collapse of a fragile economic system to the list of drivers of change. Before long, people from all over were contacting them, trying to learn from the Totnes experiment. To spread the ideas, Rob Hopkins wrote *The Transition Handbook*. Giangrande and Banks created a two-day Training for Transition workshop and have been traveling around the globe, teaching the workshop and training trainers.

Giangrande was the featured speaker at Transition Town Montpelier’s first public event, in November 2008. In July of this year, he and Banks held a public event in Montpelier, where they also met with some Transition Town activists one afternoon. Giangrande sat down with me for an interview on the basics of Transition as well as the latest news. Here are some excerpts.

**What is Transition and how did it come about?**

**Naresh Giangrande:** We live in a system, this globalized, industrialized system of an economy that requires growth every year. And that worked really well for many years. But we’ve reached the point now where we’re at an inflection point. And we really need to change this whole globalized, industrialized system into something else. And Transition Towns arose out of the realization that this change was inevitable and that if we responded to it, if we created something, a different way of living that was more in tune with how the rest of life works on this earth, then we would be better off. We could create communities that lived well, that lived, in fact, probably better than we do now. So that was the initial realization, that change was inevitable, and it was better to plan for it than just to let it happen to us.

**What proportion of the people in Totnes would you say are involved in some part of the Transition Town activities now?**

**NG:** Well, interesting you say that. We just did a representative sample survey of Totnes about five months ago, and what we found was that 75 percent of the people had heard of Transition Town and were supportive of it and thought that the stuff we were doing was good and relevant to their lives. And we also found that 40 percent of the people of Totnes had been involved in Transition Town Totnes in some shape or form; either they had spent a Totnes Pound [the local currency introduced by Transition] or they had come to a meeting or organized an event or some such thing. That’s quite a proportion of our town, and that’s quite a group to reach.

**What are some of the most exciting things going on that you’ve seen?**

**NG:** Up in the peat district, Transition Darby, they’ve started working with some farmers who have been farming organically for many years but are getting very old. In the UK, the average age of farmers is 65. They’re reaching retirement age, and they don’t know what to do. They want to hand off their land to people who are going to farm it in a way sympathetic to their values. [In Transition Darby,] they are partnering with a farmer. It’s hilly land, it’s grazing and livestock. So they’ve set up a community-supported-agriculture scheme with this farmer. They are learning an animal every year as a way to learn how to come together as a community and help this farmer farm his land. I talked to a woman, Helen, who is in Transition Darby, and she said, “If you’d told me two years ago that I was going to be a live-stock farmer, I’d have just looked you in the face and said you’re crazy. But,” she said, “that’s what I’m doing; it’s a fantastic load of skills to learn.”

When last we spoke, a year and a half ago, you introduced your talk by saying that you were here to talk about Transition from A to C because nobody knew what it looked like from D to Z. Now where are you in envisioning the future of Transition? How far down the alphabet have you come?

**NG:** I’d say we’ve added a few letters since then. First of all, what happens when you start getting a number of Transition Towns in an area? There are certain properties that emerge from that coming together in that large group of people. Local government is under a lot of pressure in the UK at the moment. They’re facing cuts of between 25 and 40 percent in their budgets. They’re looking to Transition Towns to help them deliver essential services. The reason they can do that is because there are certain areas in the UK where there are a concentration of Transition Towns. Like in Somerset, and Norfolk. And there’s a possibility in Devon, as well.

So that’s one thing that’s emerging – what happens when you start to have a group of Transition Towns.

For more of this interview with Naresh Giangrande visit www.equaltimeradio.com and look for the July 19 program.
Homestead Security: It’s the Chemicals that are Killing Us—Five All-Star Food-Medicines for New England (Part II of II)  Ben Falk

In Part One of this series, Homestead Security columnist Ben Falk described the accumulation of chemical hazards, often unnoticed, from decades of industrial and agricultural activities, even in rural Vermont. Invigorating soil and water systems, while closely building our sustenance and health upon them, will likely become more important than ever before in a future of peak oil and minerals, rapid climate change, and increasing biospheric toxicity.

As described in the last issue’s “Homestead Security” column, medicinal-quality food and water are primary defenses against increasing toxins in our biosphere. Levels of erosive chemicals — those that oxidize and mutate our cells, disturb endocrine system functioning, and in other ways undermine our health at the cellular and macro levels — continue to accumulate in our biosphere as we enter the 21st century. Reducing the affects of these toxins is possible by harnessing the remedial qualities of certain plants, animals, fungi, and even chemicals present in life-sustaining foods and medicines.

From a land-use perspective, biologically active, mineralized soil and living water are the foundation of this health, as their vigor promotes the healthful properties of the vegetables, grains, fruit, fungi, and meat grown and nurtured in and on the land. It is unlikely for the produce of land to be healthier than the soil and water from which it is grown, just as it is unlikely for the quality of our own health to be greater than the quality of the foods we consume. Maintaining and enhancing our health, therefore, begins with land-management practices that restore and develop ever-healthier biological communities which compose the land system. We can think of healthy ecosystems as the front line of toxic resistance; for every coal or nuclear power plant, of healthy ecosystems as the front line of toxic resistance; for every coal or nuclear power plant, we need, say, a million more acres of vigorous biological communities which compose the land system. We can think of healthy ecosystems as the front line of toxic resistance; for every coal or nuclear power plant, we need, say, a million more acres of vigorous ecosystem from which we might cultivate the health and resilience impaired by those facilities. Invigorating soil and water systems, while closely building our sustenance and health upon them, will likely become more important than ever before in a future of peak oil and minerals, rapid climate change, and increasing biospheric toxicity.

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At the homestead level this toxic resistance is rooted in soil- and water-enhancing activities (see

Rice paddies in Vermont? In fact, results at research farms look promising for producing brown rice here. If feasible, such water-based cropping systems would transform marginal land that is often considered un-farmable (due to high water table, heavy clay soils or tight subsoil) into intensely productive land. Rice yields are twice that of terrestrial grain. PHOTO COURTESY OF WHOLE SYSTEMS RESEARCH FARM.

Homestead Security columns from the Fall 2009 through Winter 2010 issues of Vermont Commons for an overview of these practices). Built upon this foundation of healthy water and soil are foods that are particularly powerful at helping us maintain and enhance our bodies’ immune and toxin-resisting responses. These are foods which are nutrient-dense, loaded with living organisms (cultures), antioxidants, essential fatty acids, amino acids, phytochemicals, bioflavonoids, vitamins, minerals, and micronutrients that support the mind/body in optimal health maintenance. These are, of course, whole foods eaten in the freshest forms possible and prepared in ways that preserve the enzymes present within them at harvest time, or in ways that actually increase the biological activity of the foods – as with kimchi/sauerkraut and other live-cultured foods. One can think of these “superfoods” as sources of “good chemicals” countering the influence of oxidizing and mutagenic chemicals, which degrade – rather than bolster – our bodies’ functions.

In this column I will focus on a selection of underutilized plant crops that can be grown on most sites in New England, and which people can cultivate without an overwhelming commitment of time and resources. These crops represent unusually powerful food-medicines that also tend to be restorative to the soil in which they are grown – not a coincidence, given the co-evolution of humans and plants.

The plants discussed below are just part of a larger group – allies to the human community, potential partners in our journey toward revigoration of our landscapes and ourselves to become healthier and more vibrant in the generations ahead. The information presented here is in part derived from Whole Systems Design’s testing of these species on our research sites in Vermont.

Seaberry (Hippophae rhamnoides)

Thought to originate in Eastern Europe and Siberia, seaberry is found in large expanses across Eurasia. Seaberry’s Latin name means “shining horse”; legend has it that Genghis Khan fed his army’s horses seaberry before they entered into battle. It is a large shrub, growing to about 10-feet-to-12-feet wide and 12-feet-to-18-feet high (variety-dependent) if left unpruned. The plant produces a bright orange berry that ripens in late summer.

Seaberry is exceptional in that the plant fixes nitrogen in the soil, thereby increasing that key soil nutrient which almost all other fruiting plants actually deplete. Parallel with this soil-restorative function, seaberry also aids in cellular restoration, a function thought to stem from its large spectrum of essential fatty acids (unusual for a fruit) and micronutrients.

Seaberry is one of the few fruits that actually build soil (rather than depleting it). Seaberry fixes nitrogen and yields a fruit packed with essential fatty acids, a large mineral and vitamin spectrum, and potent antioxidants. PHOTO COURTESY OF WHOLE SYSTEMS RESEARCH FARM.
The restorative quality of seaberry has been appreciated for decades, if not centuries, in Russia, where the plant pharmacopeia is highly evolved. Russian doctors have administered seaberry to patients facing environmental stresses, including cosmonauts, Olympic athletes, and people suffering from radiation poisoning. Seaberry contains about 15 times the Vitamin C of oranges, and is extremely high in essential saturated and polyunsaturated fats, carotenoids, amino acids, and many micronutrients. Of particular interest are seaberry’s likely anti-cancer benefits, which are currently being researched. Unfortunately, Seaberry’s legendary healing properties have led to over-harvesting in many areas of Europe; the plant is considered endangered in Hungary, though China has more than 600,000 hectares of it planted in dry regions of the country.

Seaberry is uniquely valuable in New England for several reasons: it fixes nitrogen; it is highly drought tolerant and tolerant of poor, dry soils; it is extremely hardy and able to tolerate high winds, salt, and cold to about zone 3 (around -40ºF). Seaberry will not tolerate wet soils and doing poorly in the shade (needing sunlight for about three quarters of the day). Most sources list seaberry as being intolerable of clay, but our research has shown that it may be grown on compacted clay soils if planting depth, amending, and mulching strategies are done specific to these conditions. Whole Systems Design is testing seaberry in hedgerows as windbreaks and living fences, and in conjunction with sheep and goats to determine browse-resistance, palatability, and use as a fodder crop for livestock medicine.

Seaberry will likely be of great import in a post-Peak Oil homestead and economy for its medicinal, food, soil-restoration, and animal-fodder/medicinal values. There exist few better ways to extend abundant nutrients produced in the growing season into the dormant season than by drying and juicing nutrient-dense produce (berries in particular). Seaberry may be superior to most other crops, currently or potentially in use, in this regard.

**Elderberry (Sambucus Canadensis)**

Vermonters and others across the cold-climate world have been cultivating and wild-foraging elderberry for millennia. Elderberry grows as a vigorous clumping shrub, six-to-12 feet in width by six-to-16 feet in height if left unpruned. You can think of elderberry as a shade-tolerant seaberry that can also tolerate moist (though not inundated) soils, even with large amounts of clay and shade present. Its small, dark berries are harvested from clumps which hold the flower heads in midsummer. Elderberries, like other strongly pigmented berries, are rich in bioflavanoids, phytochemicals and other antioxidant-containing compounds, as well as vitamins and minerals. Many parts of the plant are useful medicinally, including the berries, flowers, and bark. Interestingly, the flowers contain compounds used as compost-accelerators commercially, so the odd flower or two in your compost heap could be of significant value, like comfrey. Elderberry, like seaberry and many lesser-bred varieties of minor fruits, is nearly disease-free and can thrive with little care if planted correctly and weed-suppressed in the first year or two. Pruning needs are minimal, and elderberry is easy to harvest.

**Currants and Gooseberries (Ribes species)**

The Ribes species represent one of the only very vigorous, reliably easy-to-grow superfruits possible in the New England climate that, like elderberry, can tolerate significant shade. They are happier in full sun in northern New England but can do well in half-day sun the likes of which will lead to very poor harvests of blueberry, raspberry, blackberry, seaberry and almost any fruit tree. These plants are hardy to a wide range of soils, though they cannot withstand drouthly, sandy environments like many nitrogen-fixing plants. Ribes species have been held in high regard in most Northern European countries for generations, as they can tolerate significant cold (hardy to zone 4, easily), cloudiness, and lack of heat for ripening, as well as diseases that predominate in cool, moist climates.

Ribes are compact shrubs easily kept at three-to-four feet wide by three-to-five feet tall, and can be integrated into small spaces easily. They do well as small hedge borders and are used as such throughout many Scandinavian cities in small urban lots. Ribes fruit is generally tart, although gooseberry is less so than currant, with black currant being the most tart compared to red and white.

While new to North American growers in general, ribes have adapted well in New England, depending on soil and sun situation. Whole Systems Design’s Research Farm has planted ribes in various configurations and finds that these species generally favor mound sites with consistent moisture. This can be achieved in on-contour swales, a form of earthwork that can be highly restorative for New England’s sloping soils, as the swales catch surface water before it runs off the land.

Like all other colorful fruits described here, ribes are high in vitamins, minerals, and anti-oxidant, cancer cell-resistant factors. Its fruit is enjoyed by people fond of tart flavors, although some varieties are sweeter and not so tart. The tartest varieties, like certain black currants, are particularly useful for jams and jellies and are generally considered to be the most medicinal, as evidenced by their dark pigmentation.

**Hazelnut (Corylus cornuta)**

Of all the powerful health-promoting plant species available to us, only a small number produce food-medicines dense in proteins and fats. Hazelnut is one of these, and perhaps the only one that is productive in a short timeframe, a result of its shrub formation; all other nuts in this climate are tree-form and longer to bearing. Hazelnut oil is arguably the most valuable food-medicine produced by this plant, although the nut is of high value to humans and wildlife alike. The oil is dense in essential fatty acids while the nut meat is high in protein and fats. An abundance of minerals and micronutrients is also made available from the soil, rain, and sunshine by hazelnut.

Although this plant has been native to the New England region for centuries and possibly longer, its cultivation commercially, or even by the modern small-scale subsistence grower, has been almost nonexistent. We are experimenting with growing corylus in hedgerow patterns to figure out its optimal site, soils, harvesting, and interactions with other species. Hedgerows offer microclimate benefits, enhanced yield density, and snow-fencing functions. This medium-to-large shrub seems to favor a multiple-stem habit for maximum yield; well-drained loams are ideal, but a large array of soil types is possible, given appropriate amendments, earthworks, and water availability.

**Amaranth (Amaranthus species)**

Another rare plant for this region – in that it synthesizes high levels of protein – amaranth will continued on page 20
Homestead Security, continued from page 19
be of increasing importance for health enhance-
ments as well as local and regional food security,
for several reasons: it can be grown on marginal
soils if nitrogen is well supplied (unlike most
grains); it can be stored for long periods of time
with no energy input; it is the most protein-rich
grain in known existence (higher than quinoa);
and it is abundant in many vitamins, miner-
als, and complex carbohydrates. Amaranth is
15-percent protein, contains lysine (which most
grains lack), and is gluten-free.
Amaranth arguably (possibly along with rice)
stands alone in its high potential as an energy
(carbohydrate) crop for the post-Peak Oil home
and community-scale food system in the cold
climates of the world. More research and breed-
ing is needed to further the human-amaranth
coevolution and potential value for cold-climate
human settlements.

Diversity and Vigor: Response to Toxicity
“The greatest service which can be rendered
any country is to add a useful plant to its
[agri]culture.” – Thomas Jefferson

These five plants represent a small sampling
of the options available for adapting to the increas-
ing rate of change and adversity brought about
by both natural cycles and the terminal phase
of industrial empire. Other options – includ-
ing honeyberry, shiitake and many other mush-
rooms, styrian pumpkin (for seed), chestnut, nut
pine and many other nuts and seeds, along with
a selection of powerful vegetables and animal
foods – will be harnessed as a new era of land-
based toxic resistance is mounted.

Increasing our prospects to survive and thrive
depends upon expanding our sustenance possi-
bilities – the options that each food-fuel species,
variety, and production system represents. Every
food and fuel plant, animal, and fungus species
(and variety) represent options for enhancing
the critical link between humans and their envi-
ronment. The development of this cornucopia
allows us to expand the length of our growing
season, the range and density of our nutrition,
and the variety of our fuel sources – which, taken
together, enables us to increase the resilience of
the human ecosystem and its ability to cope with
change.

The Take-Make-Waste operating system of
industrial society has amassed an unprecedented
challenge for humanity: invigorate or devolve.
Avoiding a future of mass cancer, mutation,
obesity, and a general perversion of the human
condition will rely upon a human-ecosystem
response harnessing the most potently regenera-
tive land, water, and human-health-promoting
systems and species. We can respond by allying
ourselves not with any political party or version
of Bigness, but with Smallness and the particu-
lars of a living place – soil, plants, animals, fungi,
water, and other forces in the web of life on this
still-breathing planet. •

Loaded with crucial fat and protein, amaranth is a super grain
surpassing even quinoa in most regards, with a nutrient spec-
trum closer to a nut than a typical grain. Here it is seen trialed
in the leach-field garden at Whole System Design’s research
farm in Moretown. PHOTO COURTESY OF WHOLE SYSTEMS RESEARCH FARM.

Shiitake mushrooms contain 30-percent protein and grow at
45°F in dense shade upon wood – making them an optimal
crop for Vermont, post-Peak Oil. PHOTO COURTESY OF WHOLE SYSTEMS RESEARCH FARM.
The two biggest barriers to the local-food movement have always been cost and time: the often-higher cost of local food compared to food from industrial agriculture, and the time it takes to prepare whole foods compared to ready-made foods and highly processed foods that can become a meal in minutes. For the past five years, the Localvore movement has worked to reduce the perception of those barriers by showing people how to eat local on a budget and how to quickly prepare local meals. But there is more to being a Localvore than that.

The truth is that being a Localvore is not easy, and this is probably why at best 10 percent to 15 percent of Vermonters are truly committed to buying and eating local food. It takes a lot of time to source and prepare local food. For example, I love going to the farmers’ market on Saturday morning, but by the time I drive to the market, purchase everything that I need and visit with friends along the way, half of Saturday (or 25 percent of my weekend) is gone.

I realized this in the spring when my husband and I put together an aggressive list of things that we needed to do around the house this summer. If we had any chance of completing the list of projects, we were going to need to cut back on our time at the farmers’ market on Saturdays. Instead, what I started doing was making a run through our town on Friday morning stopping at various farms to pick up flowers, cheese, syrup, vegetables, meat, and milk. It turns out that there was no time savings; it still took the better part of the morning to complete my rounds and I burned a lot of gas in the process.

The Localvore movement has successfully picked the low-hanging fruit, you might say. But how are we going to go beyond that so that more

We need to adapt the local-food economy to Vermonters’ lifestyles, rather than asking Vermonters to adapt their lifestyle to local food, as we have been doing for the past five years.

In Vermont five years ago, our message has been that people need to change the way that they shop for food. Instead of one-stop shopping at the local grocery store chain, we told people to get their produce at the farmers’ market, at farm stands, or grow their own. When we heard the all-too-familiar excuse that local food was too expensive, we suggested people change their diets or eat lower on the hog, so to speak. I even suggested in presentations and articles that we should be eating more like peasants.

I was brought to my senses when someone asked me what portion of people in Vermont is truly committed to buying local food. Heck, just about everyone that I know is, but what about all of those people buying produce at the grocery store in the peak of the summer? My best guess (as noted above) was that about 10 percent to 15 percent of people in our community are committed to buying local food, and I expect that is the same for the rest of Vermont. In fact, several experts I have talked with agree with my estimate. Whether it is 5 percent, 10 percent, or even 20 percent, from a Localvore’s standpoint the question remains the same: How do we get more people to eat more local food?

Recently, I was in the huge Shaw’s grocery store in Waterbury and I observed several people shopping in the produce department. The vegetables were beautiful and people were filling their carts with tomatoes, lettuce, and other seasonal produce. What would it take to get those people to buy local tomatoes over the California variety they were grabbing? My question was answered when I noticed a beautiful display of zucchini that was identified as coming from Sam Mazza’s farm in Colchester. A mother with two kids in tow was carefully selecting zucchini and putting them into her basket.

There was the answer: convenience and price. The Mazza’s zucchini looked good, it didn’t require a special trip to the farm, and it was being sold at a price that was comparable to other zucchini.

If we have any hope of Localvorism going beyond the committed local-food buyers, we need local food to be more accessible and affordable (and, I am not suggesting that farmers make less money). We need to bring local food to where people shop and not ask people to shop where local food is. If local food was more convenient, more people would purchase it – not necessarily because it is local, but because it is there when they need it. Is that bad? I don’t think so. Not everyone has the time to connect with their local farmer every time they want to make a salad.

I realize that what I am suggesting is not a simple task. But if we truly want all Vermonters eating more local food, then we need to broaden our thinking about how we are going to achieve that. It is time to start looking more deeply into what it is really going to take to make eating local a reality on every Vermonter’s plate.

**Localvore Living: Expanding the Localvore Circle in Vermont**

Robin McDermott
**Vermont Vox Populi: Broadcasting Media for Democracy – An Interview with CCTV’s Lauren-Glenn Davitian**  
Rob Williams

As Vermont’s flagship community cable television station, what exactly does Burlington-based CCTV do?

Lauren-Glenn Davitian: CCTV Center for Media & Democracy, www.cctv.org, is a free-speech organization that opens the door for community activists, local government and nonprofit organizations to increase their reach and impact. We started some of Vermont’s first community access channels in 1984 and today we operate Channel 17/ Town Meeting Television (a regional government-access TV channel, www.channel17.org), CCTV Productions (a media production company), and Common Good Vermont (a nonprofit capacity-building project, http://commongoodvt.org).

So in the age of the Internet, why does community cable television matter?

Lauren-Glenn Davitian (LGD): In some ways, yes. You ask, why does this matter in the Internet age? Because there is no equivalent in the internet age. The FCC does not require internet providers to set aside bandwidth and revenue for public purposes, even though they, too, are using public rights of way! Community access is an oasis on the increasingly commercialized communications networks and it must, at all costs, be preserved. The ultimate objective of CCTV and access advocates across the country is to require public access to all telecommunications networks. I am not sure we will be able to achieve this in the upcoming rewrite of the Federal Communications Act, but we are working toward this. If we don’t we may lose this precious access to our public property.

And the Internet seems to be changing the rules of the game.

LGD: There are now 24 community media centers operating 44 public, educational, and government-access channels across the state of Vermont – a vibrant network of community building across the state. These channels exist because cable operators use the public rights of way to string their cable and offer commercial services – cable, and now the Internet.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) requires the cable operators to set aside community access channels and a percentage of cable company revenue for public use. Community cable TV is like a public park or a public boat launching area; it’s the way we get to access and use what is essentially public property.

Some refer to you as the “spiritual godmother of Vermont community cable.” How did you get involved in CCTV?

LGD: I’ll try to make it short. When I was at the University of Vermont I studied anthropology and started to document the changing life of the people in Winooski, Vermont. I was very interested in how to let them tell their own stories through audio and video, and began to see a vital connection between free speech and a community’s ability to determine its own future.

NICE.

LGD: When I discovered John Grierson (founder of the British Film Board, Canadian Film Board, and producer of many influential documentaries)
I got really excited, because in the 1930s he talked about the power of democratic media to make a difference. He said, "Once good feelings and good ideas move like wildfire across the democratic sky, we are halfway towards building a community worth living in."

Through this line of study, I learned about George Stoney and how he started the public access TV movement in the U.S., using many of Grierson’s principles and lessons from the Canadian Film Board’s “Challenge for Change” project.

Yeah, Stoney was a real visionary, by all accounts.

LGD: Putting all of this together, I marched to Cox Cable in 1983 and asked for the channels, equipment, and money necessary to open the airwaves for the people of Chittenden County, Vermont. They were not very responsive and thought that I’d just go away. Instead, we got organized and with other like-minded free speechers, organized CCTV and made a compelling case to the Vermont Public Service Board. They supported our request and required Cox Cable to provide funding and channels in Burlington, Montpelier, Middlebury, and Rutland. More channels followed.

Vermont is blessed with more than two dozen community cable TV stations around the Green Mountains. How do you account for this burgeoning interest and involvement?

LGD: More channels followed those first four because Vermont people like to talk things over and make up their own minds about important issues. If offered the opportunity to watch their local government and neighbors and even to speak their own mind, they are willing to pay a small fee on their cable bill to do it. It makes sense as a cost-effective way to control and manage their own local media network.

How has the coming of Web 2.0 convergence culture transformed community cable television? How has the role of community cable changed over the years?

LGD: Public access TV channels have evolved into community media centers that remain open to all continued on page 24
Vermont Vox Populi, continued from page 23

members of the community and offer an increasing range of digital production tools, new media strategy and training, and online (as well as TV channel) distribution. We continue to work together to serve our communities. For example, all of Vermont’s media centers share the Vermont Media Exchange, which enables us to distribute community programs to channels across the state!

Looking ahead, what are the biggest challenges to community cable television in Vermont?

LGD: The biggest challenge is the cable industry’s argument to the feds that they should not be required to provide public, educational, and government-access channels. They claim that it makes it more difficult to compete with satellite providers (who do not have the same requirement), and they, increasingly, are moving programming to Internet services that do not have the same public-access requirements. Slowly, through outright legislation or attrition, our media programs will move off the cable networks and to the Internet, and the precedent and revenue for our channels may no longer exist. This is why we need to fight to expand public access to all communications carriers.

How do you know that the work you are doing has an impact at the local, state and national level?

LGD: We know we make a local impact because many, many people tell us that Channel 17 is the “go to” channel for local elections and public meeting coverage. A 2009 Comcast survey shows that 30 percent of cable viewers watch community access channels in Chittenden County and across the state. We know that 8,000 viewers come to www.cctv.org every month and watch our programs there. Dozens of people attend our Media Maven and video training. Local government officials know that we are reliable way to reach their residents.

I believe that this change is best measured locally. Other local access channels across the state and country are able to generate the viewership and involvement that comes from the free flow of information, the opportunity to speak freely, and the tools to mobilize supporters to make change happen.

Thanks for talking with us, and for all of your vital “media and democracy” work.

LGD: Thank you.
I didn’t find the old sugarhouse foundation until the third or fourth summer we lived on our land. Unlike so many things I don’t do, or don’t do until much later than one might expect, this was not due to laziness; after all, we were building a house at the time. For a while there, strolling in the woods was not particularly high on the priority list.

The foundation is tucked into a stand of mature balsam fir, a handful of which have grown up inside of it, towering high above a roofline that is visible only in the mind’s eye. The sugaring rig is still there, rusted and listing, slowly returning to the rich soil like the bones of some great beast. There is no evidence of the wooden structure that once stood atop the stacked fieldstone, but I can imagine its rough form, the beams and boards hewn by the stroke of the broad axe and stained by the sweat of the task.

It was for the syrup – or the money the syrup would bring – that someone gathered and arranged those hundreds of stones. It was for this that someone felled the trees and shaped the wood, hung and gathered the buckets, cut and piled the sugaring wood, stoked the fire in the big rig, sat up late as steam rose high into the night sky. What might they have been thinking? Of the morning chores that would come all too soon? Of what they’d buy with the syrup money? Surely they wondered over the weather, hoping for another sap run or two before the maples budded out and the season ended as abruptly as it had begun.

Our house is built now, or close enough to it, and so on occasion I walk down to the foundation and perch myself on one of those stones. It is a luxury, I know, to take this time. But I do not sit for long: ten, maybe fifteen minutes. Just enough to sense that depth of history, to be comforted by the knowledge that someone worked this land before me.

Enough to be reminded that the things I experience – the quiet satisfactions, the dispiriting setbacks, the occasional whooping joys – are nothing new to this place. It has seen them all, time and again, and the record of mine will merely be added to the records of those that have come before me: A tumbledown fieldstone foundation, almost lost to the forest. A farm implement, broken into pieces and half buried at the edge of a field. A rusted metal chair perched at the height of a wooded knoll: Who put that there, and for what?

I want to live my life honestly. Not only in my relationships to other humans, but also in my relationships to the animals and land around me. For as much as other people, they are what sustain me, and they deserve nothing less. Indeed, I deserve nothing less. This seems if nothing else an obvious truth, a clear and necessary path, and yet it is too often lost in the hurried, day-to-day rushing from chore to chore.

So every so often I walk down to the old sugarhouse foundation and sit. And I feel the unshakable integrity of those stones, stacked by hand, pulled by the hoof of some loyal beast. I imagine I can see the structure that has long since fallen away and been consumed by the forest, and I consider the work of it all: the saw blade back-and-forth, back-and-forth, the bit of the axe rising and falling, again and again and again. The buckets of sap heavy and sloshing, 30 or more gallons to make just one of syrup, most of it to be boiled away, rising into the air as if it were nothing at all.

And at the end of the night, with the fire gone cold and the March sky a cold blanket of stars, all that will remain is the sweet distillation of these efforts. The honest return on an honest investment.
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The USS Constitution – had over 90 tons of hemp (cutting off our supply of manila and jute) during World War II the U.S. gave out tons of hemp seeds to 4-H clubs and farmers throughout the Midwest to help with the war effort by creating rope and rigging for the navy. It was considered so patriotic that hemp farmers were excused from military service. When George H. W. Bush parachuted from his plane, the straps were made of hemp and saved his life.

The Partnership for a Drug Free America consists of Big Oil, Big Pharma, alcohol and tobacco industries, as they don’t want their profits diminished by the utilization of cannabis. If we changed from a fossil fuel-based economy to a hemp-based one it would solve energy and other national security issues, as we can be self-sufficient and grow our own energy and don’t need to bleed billions of dollars a day to countries with oil that dislike us. The ramifications of a hemp-based economy could even affect global climate change. Beginning over a century ago, every government and scientific study has shown only beneficial applications. When the British army was in India, there was concern about the amount of soldiers smoking ganja. So the British Indian Hemp Commission of 1898 did a study and found only beneficial medical applications. Mayor LaGuardia of New York in the 1920s had a study done which recommended its continued use. The same was true under Nixon’s Shafer Commission, which recommended decriminalization. President Carter once said “the penalties against a drug (marijuana) shouldn’t be worse than its use.”

Under President Clinton, drug czar Gen. Barry McCaffrey wanted to stop states from legalizing medicinal marijuana and commissioned the National Academy of Sciences’ prestigious Institute of Medicine to do an exhaustive two-year study. Their three most-salient findings were that cannabis is not addictive, is not a gateway drug, and has beneficial medical applications. The DEA’s own Judge Francis L. Young called it “the safest therapeutic substance known to mankind.” Cannabis is so safe that there has never been an overdose in history.

Instead of arresting almost a million Americans every year on cannabis charges at a cost of $50,000 per inmate, not to mention billions more on law enforcement costs, we need to change a failed, flawed policy that has continued for over 73 years. Insanity has been defined as repeating the same behavior and expecting different results, and all we get is more money wasted and lives ruined because of prohibition.

A revived cannabis industry could create tens of millions of good-paying non-outsourceable jobs and help save the environment at the same time. Hemp paper, unlike tree paper, does not require toxic chlorine in its manufacture. Hemp needs a small amount of natural fertilizer to grow instead of using all kinds of toxic chemicals in the manufacture of other products. Cannabis is good for the economy and the environment.

If Vermont does decide to secede from the American Empire, ending cannabis prohibition should be among the top agendas for the independent Republic of Vermont. It would not only help save the family farm but increase it many-fold. I envisage having five factory processing plants in north, east, south, west, and in central Vermont. Farmers could take their harvests to be processed into food, fuel, fiber, medicine, and the 50,000 other industrial uses. Plastics, for example, could be made from polymerized cannabis. Spin-off industries would create a goldmine for new jobs and businesses while preserving the environment at the same time. I say it’s time to end prohibition now.

With all the known uses for cannabis, hemp, a.k.a. marijuana, it is insane not to utilize this wondrous, versatile plant. It is time to re-legalize this plant to serve man as God intended. (Genesis 1:29: “And God said behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed.”)

If you doubt my thoughts on the subject of prohibition, then [check this out, from the law-enforcement perspective]. Law Enforcement Against Prohibition (http://www.leap.cc/cms/index.php) has a 12-minute intro video on their homepage. Walter Cronkite said of this, “Anyone concerned about the failure of our $69-billion-a-year War on Drugs should watch this. It is a must-see for any journalist or public official dealing with this issue.”

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You might all be interested, and proud, to know that right now Vermont has the standout secessionist organization in the country, a beacon for the movement.

There is some action elsewhere. The folks in the Texas Nationalist Movement who have opened a “prototype” office in Nederland, southeast Texas, are suing Mexico for the return of artifacts taken from the Alamo 175 years ago, and continue with their petition for a referendum on Texas secession. The Alaska Independence Party ran candidates for offices in the recent primary, garnering 4 percent of the vote, and has a candidate for the governorship this fall. The Puerto Rican Independence Party was a strong supporter of the student strike at the University of Puerto Rico this spring, in which students eventually won significant concessions. The Palmetto Republic organizers in South Carolina had a demonstration on July 3 for Secession Day 2010.

And that’s that. For all the talk about secession these days – and it’s agreed that there’s more of that than any time since, let’s say, 1860 – there’s not that much action going on. Only Vermont has mounted a serious and potentially important political assault. That’s the good news, and the bad.

But if there’s more talk than action in the secession movement, it is also true that there is a great deal of talk. A lot of thoughtful people all over the country are looking at all aspects of secession, some with scholarly attention, some with political passion, to a degree that would have been unimaginable five years ago. And when you figure that this is an idea still an anathema for much of the country, ignorant as they are about it, so much attention is really remarkable.

The best way is to follow this outpouring is on the extraordinarily thorough and very valuable website created by South Carolinian Bill Miller at SecessionNews.com. (He also has a site called SecessionUniversity.com, where he intends to archive all the postings that he puts up on his other site, plus other secession-related material. They didn’t have that 150 years ago.) Beyond that, there are a half-dozen other chief sites for secession discussions: DumpDC.com, LibertyDefensel.eague.com, Palmettorepublic.org, Athousandnations.com, LewRockwell.com, and TenthAmendmentCenter.com.

Below are a few recent sample selections from those sites to give you an idea of the kind of chatter that’s out there.

• Wilton Strickland, Liberty Defense League (libertydefenseleague.com)

From a moral perspective, secession is legitimate because government is only a means to achieve human happiness, not an end that requires sacrificing our happiness on a government altar… Modern secession would be legitimate because it seeks to honor the Constitution and reject a renegade government that desecrates it… Modern government clearly has breached the constitutional contract, so government has no . . . argument to keep us from leaving. I venture that a new American republic carved out of the old one would serve the Constitution’s ideals more faithfully than anything we’ve witnessed in our lifetimes.

Yet the psychological hurdle remains, largely out of the fear that a seceding territory will prove racist, corrupt, or oppressive. The strongest response to qualms of this sort is that secession creates more choices, and membership is optional. A new republic carved out of the old one would not compel anyone to join or penalize anyone for trying to leave (something that the current regime cannot say for itself).

One more reason for secession cannot go ignored: It is the wave of the future. The past few decades have witnessed the collapse of bloated centers of power, yielding a constellation of new nation-states with no need or desire to assert the global dominance that the American political class clutches to its chest. This sort of dominance is a relic that cannot withstand the new competitive environment or the onrush of technology that further empowers us to exchange ideas, goods, and money as we see fit.

Ours is a world of decentralization, flexibility, and choice. To secede is to look forward; to support a Byzantine and unlawful empire is to look backward. —Wilton Strickland

• Russell Longcore, DumpDC

Secession is the hope for humanity. Who will be first?

• Bill Miller, Secessionuniversity.com

Secession—the right to it, the lingering threat of it—is what gives ultimate power to the people in a political system. The right to secede gives the people control, as the ultimate influence, over their government instead of the other way around. It implies a continual assent from the people that, for the moment, this government is the best one we can envision, and if it’s not, we have a right to either change it or form a new one more responsive to, and reflective of, our common needs.

• Chuck Baldwin, Liberty Defense League

People all over America are discussing freedom’s future. In short, they are worried. In fact, many are actually talking about State secession. In coffee shops and cafes, and around dining room tables, millions of people are speaking favorably of states breaking away from the union. Not since the turn of the twentieth century have so many people thought (and spoken) this favorably about the prospect of a State (or group of states) exiting the union.

In my mind, this is a good thing.

Good, indeed.
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Political Independence. We believe our primary objective is political independence for our once and future Vermont republic, through the legitimate constitutional process of nonviolent secession from the United States.

Entrusting the Commons. We advocate the creation and maintenance, through legislation and oversight, of a Vermont "Commons" - environmental, cultural, social, informational - to value and protect all that we Vermonsters share in common - our air, our water, our land, and our property, both private and communal.

Human Scale. We believe that life is best lived on a human scale, in face-to-face contacts with neighbors and friends, in communities that are decentralized in structure. Small is still beautiful.

Financial Independence. We support the creation and use of a publicly-owned Bank of Vermont that would issue low-interest loans and foster a peer-to-peer mutual credit system, and the creation and use of a statewide alternative currency system.

Food Sovereignty. We support family-owned farms and small businesses that produce innovative, premium-quality, healthy locally manufactured products.

Election Integrity. We recommend that Vermont, in conducting its local and state elections, replace all corporately-owned electronic voting machines with the time-honored traditional hand counting procedure used by each Vermont town's board of civil authority, encouraging a process that is open, public, and transparent.

Energy Independence. We encourage 21st century approaches that move us away from our reliance on imported fossil fuels and centralized electrical generation, and toward policies that encourage import-substitution, and a more local and diversified energy portfolio, with emphasis on self-sufficient home-2nd business-generated energy.

Homestead Security. We celebrate Vermont's small, clean, green, sustainable, socially responsible towns, farms, businesses, schools, and places of worship. We encourage the diversification of our 21st century Vermont's working landscape, and the creation of more opportunities for Vermonters to produce their own food, energy, and value-added products.

Education for Democracy. All young Vermonters should have open access to learning opportunities that enable them to realize their own unique potentials and to participate actively and responsibly in their communities and society at large. Drawing on the "Vermont Design for Education," we advocate the replacement of federally-mandated standardized testing and rigid rote learning with "hands on" community-centered education, and the creation of a "communiversity" in every Vermont town's public school.

Economic Solidarity. We encourage Vermonters to buy locally produced products from local merchants, rather than purchase from giant, out-of-state mega-stores. We support fair and open trade with nearby states and provinces.

Power Sharing. Vermont's strong democratic tradition is grounded in its town meetings. We favor devolution of political power from the state back to local communities, making the governing structure for towns, schools, hospitals, and social services much like that of small decentralized states like Switzerland. Shared power also underlies our approach to international relations.

Equal Opportunity. We support equal access for all Vermont citizens to high quality education, preventative and routine health care, housing, and employment.

Tension Reduction. We urge the Vermont state legislature and governor to issue a call for the return of Vermont National Guard troops from Afghanistan, Iraq, and the other 700 plus U.S. military bases in more than 130 countries around the world. Consistent with both Vermont's long "live and let live" tradition and policies of nonviolence, we do not condone state-sponsored violence inflicted either by the military or law enforcement officials. We support a voluntary citizens' brigade to reduce tension and restore order in the event of civil unrest, and to provide emergency assistance when natural disasters occur. We are opposed to any form of military conscription. Tension reduction is the bedrock principle on which all international conflicts are to be resolved.