**Bye Bye Miss American Empire**

*Introduction*

Bill Kauffman

Bill Kauffman’s recent book, *Bye Bye Miss American Empire*, is reviewed elsewhere in this issue by Ron Miller, a member of the Vermont Commons editorial board. In coming issues, with the author’s permission, we plan to publish Vermont-focused excerpts of the book, beginning with this “Introduction.”

The American Empire is dead. That gathering murmur you hear is not sobbing: Good riddance to the damn monster. Rather, the noise is the sweet hum of revolution, of subjects learning how to be citizens, of people shaking off (or flipping off) their Wall Street and Pentagon over-lords and taking charge of their lives once more, whether as members of verdant countryside or the sodality of the city neighborhood.

Oh, the empire’s corpse may yet wander the desert sands, rattling chains in Marley-like clangor, but the thing itself, as a breathing and vascular entity with its own tomorrows, is dead. An expiry long past due, I might say. Senator J. William Fulbright, the only good Bill ever to exit Arkansas for the national political stage, said in the 1960s that “the price of empire is America’s soul and that price is too high.” He was right. The American Empire, that cold-eyed death machine that ground American boys into fodder to spit out into the frozen Chosin of Korea, the rice paddies of Southeast Asia, the dunes of Mesopotamia, has run out of money, out of even the fig leaf of moral justification, out of any international sanction save the specious pule of the coerced and the fraudulent. The empire – what Edmund Wilson called “a huge blundering power unit controlled more and more by bureaucracies whose rule is making it more and more difficult to carry on the tradition of American individualism” – always was the enemy of the true America, the America of Mark Twain and Levon Helm, Henry Thoreau and Zora Neale Hurston. The empire demanded that we pledge allegiance to the distant over the near, to the abstract over the real, to perpetual war over peace and harmony.

The Crash of 2008 and its salutary humbling of continued on page 9

**Most Likely To Secede: U.S. Empire, Vermont Secession, Citizen Journalism, and Media Democracy (Part 2)**

Rob Williams

(Part 1 of this exploration of nonviolent secession and its imperative for Vermont, by Vermont Commons Publisher Rob Williams, appeared in the Fall 2010 issue and is available online.)

“You can’t bloat a modest republic into a rapulent empire without sparking one hell of a centrifugal reaction.”

–Bill Kauffman, *Bye Bye Miss American Empire*

Chelsea Green, 2010)

“The Gods of the Empire are not the Gods of Vermont.”

–Dennis Steele; 2010 Vermont independent gubernatorial candidate

“Secession is every American’s birthright.”

–Vermont Commons: Voices of Independence news journal

**Secession: Why Vermont?**

First consider Vermont’s political origins and culture. Vermont is the only state to exist prior to the creation of the United States as its own independent republic. Fourteen years, to be exact: from 1777 to 1791. “Only in Vermont was the concept of a state as self-constituted political community fully and radically tested,” writes historian Peter Onuf in his book *The Origins of the Federal Republic*. “In this sense, Vermont was the only true American republic, for it alone has created itself.” (The Lone Star Republic of Texas and the Bear Flag Republic of California were both wrested from Spanish Mexico by force.)

The state of Vermont, moreover, was front and
Editorial

Come Back, Vermont

It struck me as odd, the lack of mention of Vermont’s origins as an independent republic, or of its founders, during a late-September tour of our marvel of a State House in Montpelier. I’d led friends from Victoria, B.C., up the broad grey granite steps to the portico in front of the imposing front doors, where we were unexpectedly greeted by a docent and invited to take a tour. Why not, we agreed?

Once inside the main lobby we were shown the large marble bust of Illinois’ native son Abraham Lincoln, the Great Centralizer, and two large portraits of admirals, sons of Vermont and “heroes” of America’s first oversees imperial war, the Spanish-American; upstairs, commanding center stage of the Vermont Representatives’ Hall hung a magisterial portrait of General George Washington, father of the United States of America. Okay, I mused silently, but what about the founder of Vermont, and his Green Mountain Boys? Wasn’t this the Vermont State House, not merely a Washington, D.C., satrapy honoring national heroes?

My hopes lifted when our amiable guide next took us into the largely ceremonial Vermont Governor’s Office, to view the “Constitution Chair” where our governors sit. Aha, I thought, now we’ll hear about the Vermont Constitution (the one that forbade slavery from inception, and antedated the U.S.’s by a decade). But no, we were informed the chair was hewn from the timbers of the United States warship “Old Ironsides,” in honor of the U.S. Constitution. Our guide then led us into the nearby Cedar Creek Reception Room, one whole wall of which is covered by a vast canvas depicting the Battle of Cedar Creek in which Vermont soldiers reversed the tide of an October 1864 Union retreat in Virginia’s magnificent Shenandoah Valley.

During the entire tour our guide never uttered a word of Ethan Allen, the Green Mountain Boys, the founding of Vermont itself (our particular state), the Vermont Constitution, or the 14-year history of the Vermont Republic. And yet a statue of Ethan stands on the front portico, and a picture of him and other founders of Vermont, all standing with Benedict Arnold after their capture of Fort Ticonderoga, hangs in a far corner of the Cedar Creek Reception Room.

This struck me as strange: a tour of Vermont’s own State House in which all the notable symbols were about the nation, the sacrifices of nation-and-empire building, and none about the origins of the state of Vermont.

I felt cheated.

Driving my Canadian guests home along back roads made me more-than-usually sensitive to flags. I was suddenly struck by how many U.S. flags hung from private houses and public buildings, and by how the comely dark-blue-and-green state flag was notably absent. This was an observation that already had been growing and perplexing me. When my wife and I came to live in Vermont almost three decades ago the Vermont flag was a common sight. No longer. I suspected my observation wasn’t trivial.

Why were Vermonters no longer flying their Vermont flags – either alone or alongside the stars and stripes? Why had we Vermonters ceased to honor and cherish our flag? To leave it folded in our closets and attics?

In 1986 Vermont Governor Madeleine Kunin tried to resist usurpation of her authority over the Vermont National Guard during peacetime by denying the federally ordered deployment of the Vermont guard to train in Nicaragua. Other governors, notably Minnesota’s, also resisted the order. Congress responded by passing the Montgomery Amendment that same year, cancelling the governors’ sole authority over the non-emergency peacetime deployment of the state guards. Later, the 2007 Warner Defense Administration Act was passed, completing the evisceration of a governor’s authority: “The President of the United States will now be able to take control of a state’s National Guard units without the governor’s consent.”

Loosely described as the U.S. military-industrial complex, the forces that nullified the most fundamental aspect of Vermont’s sovereignty (and all other states’ as well) gathered a head of steam that could not be broken after 9/11. The Pentagon got to keep its hold over the populace and their taxes via perpetual pre-emptive warfare, despite the sudden, unwelcome prospects for peace after the Soviet Union had collapsed a decade earlier.

Fear – the U.S. state’s basic coercive strategy – had won.

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Contributors

Ian Baldwin is cofounder of Chelsea Green Publishing and is Publisher Emeritus of Vermont Commons: Voices of Independence.

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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David Garten is a professional photographer based in Vermont’s Mad River Valley.

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.

Sarah Grillo is a cartoonist living in the greater Burlington area.

Bill Kauffman, the author of nine books, lives in his native upstate New York with his family.

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.

William Murray is as recent UVM graduate in Community Development and Applied Economics. He is now pursuing graduate studies to research spectrum for the proposed Vermont Common Asset Trust Fund.

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.

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Letter to the Editor

LOCKED OUT: MEDIA BIAS AND CIRCULAR REASONING

Editor, Vermont Commons:

The media are saying, in the words of Hearst employee Stewart Ledbetter, "Vermont does not have the same backlash against the two-party system as other states." Still, the corporate media paint a false picture to portray the forty-odd independent candidates in Vermont as nonexistent or "fringe." Yet the broadcast media get a tax break from the incumbent Vermont Legislature estimated at $375 million per year (UVM/Gund Institute, Vermont Green Tax and Common Assets Project, based on The Citizen's Guide to the Airwaves by New America Foundation).

The media work with the well-paid managers of nonprofits and other partners like VPR to lock independents out of the debates and public forums. No wonder independents get so few votes come November. Then the media and nonprofits turn around and say that since independents have no chance to win, why invite them? Not only is this a self-fulfilling prophecy but circular reasoning at its worst.

There is a political machine in Vermont. We must replace it. We can stand against the wars, as kids come to school hungry and against Vermont's continued financing of those wars, as kids come to school hungry and vital programs are being cut, not to mention the loud exchange about curing the $150-million budget shortfall. Charging broadcasters for the use of our airwaves would balance the deficit 2.5 times! Based on information and belief, the Gund report was submitted to the Vermont House Ways and Means Committee. Response? Zero. Representative democracy has two minor shortcomings: it is not representative and not democracy. Members of the professional career-politician class are concerned with their re-election, not the public interest and public will. A single two-year term limit would replace that class with independents not controlled by party apparatchiks.

The U.S. and present Vermont self-perpetuating political class, supported by media and nonprofits, has created "incumbentosis," an emotional disorder that is part of the political-conservatism syndrome. Albert Einstein defined irrational as doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result. Reminds me of demopublican voters. They are not irrational but brainwashed to such an extent that they appear and act irrationally.

- Peter D. Moss

Fairfax

Mr. Moss ran in 2010 as an independent and "independence" candidate for the Vermont Senate and the U.S. Senate.
Most Likely to Secede, continued from page 1

Center throughout 19th-century New England’s secession conversations related to militarism, war, and expansion. Vermont was the first state to outlaw slavery within its borders; and Vermonter today still speak out against tyranny of all kinds – nuclear war, GMO seeds, the unlawful conscription of National Guard troops by the U.S. government for foreign invasions – every March during our annual town meeting day.

To outsiders, it seems easy to pigeonhole tiny Vermont. The national corporate commercial “news” media think they have Vermont pegged as the bluest of Blue States, chock-full of “Obama-loving, latte-drinking, Prius-driving, Birkenstock-wearing, trust-fund babies.” It is true that we have more than our fair share of Prius drivers on Vermont roads, and that 70 percent of the Vermont electorate voted for Mr. Obama in the 2008 presidential election (if electronic voting machines, which even tiny and independent-minded Vermont possesses in some of our towns, are to be believed). It is also true that Vermont political trends are not so easily understood. To wit: we were the first state to bless civil unions for gay couples, AND, as a state of hunters and farmers, we have the most permissive gun-carry laws of any state in the country.

Rather than Red-versus-Blue, “radical” is our term of choice. “Arguably, Vermont is the most radical state in the Union, in terms of its commitment to human solidarity, sustainability, direct democracy, egalitarianism, political independence, and nonviolence,” writes Thomas Naylor. Culturally, historically, and politically, Vermont, with its commitment to live-and-let-live tolerance, its promotion of individual rights, when balanced with its attention to the common good (“Freedom and Unity” is our state’s current motto), is a natural starting place for considering any state’s nonviolent secession. The word “radical” is simply defined as “getting to the root cause of a thing.” And this thing called “the United States” is simply too big, too centralized, too corrupt, too inefficient, and too impossible to govern anymore. “If something is wrong, it is too big,” wrote Leopold Kohr in his 1957 book The Breakdown of Nations. “Instead of Union, let us have disunion now. Instead of fusing the small, let us dismember the big. Instead of creating fewer and larger states, let us create more and smaller ones.” If we heed Kohr’s advice, Vermont can help re-invent the United States as the United States – decentralized, relocalized, with a “small is beautiful” paradigm.

Perhaps UVM political science professor Frank Bryan and Vermont state representative/beekeeper Bill Mares said it best in their whimsical yet provocative 1987 book Out: The Vermont Secession Book: “Vermonters can do it better themselves. We are better at education, welfare, building roads, catching crooks, dispensing justice, and helping farmers. We report our own news better. Vermonters know much more about what’s happening in Vermont than Americans know about what’s happening in America. We’re better at democracy, too, much better. We can balance our budget! We’ve watched as Congress pitters and patters, dillies and dallies, postures, poses and primp. If that’s America’s idea of democracy, we want out! We report our own news better.” It is to journalism, media, and democracy that we now turn.

Secession, Democracy, and the Newspaper You’re Holding

“Ideology of any sort . . . is a road without end that carries the enthusiast far from anyplace resembling home,” author Bill Kauffman writes in his 2010 book Bye Bye Miss American Empire. “A healthy secessionist movement must be founded in love: love of a particular place, its people (of all ethnicities and colors), its culture, its language and books and music and baseball teams, and yes, its beer and flowers and punk rock clubs.” And love of its journalism, as well.

The Vermont independence movement’s state-wide newspaper – Vermont Commons, Independence – quietly marked its fifth year in publication last spring. As the founding (web) editor and now publisher, I’ve worked with our editorial board to co-create a particular set of values that may help re-invent journalism in this new century. Though an organic process shaped by experimentation, adaptability, and close monitoring of the larger “landscape of crisis” that has characterized the national news business, we’ve developed a set of principles I’d like to share here.

In our more optimistic moments, we like to think that we are helping to pioneer a new and more sustainable model for 21st-century journalism, based on the following elements.

**Principle #1: Provide News for People, Not Profit**

We see Vermont Commons news journal as a sort of nonprofit and homegrown “statewide multimedia coffeehouse,” not as a commercially run-for-profit competitive industry. In an era marked by dramatic corporate media consolidation and the gutting of the print news business, we envision our news journal as providing an essential public service for thinking Vermonters of all stripes. “Founded in 2005, Vermont Commons: Voices of Independence is a news journal by and for the citizens of Vermont,” reads our website’s introduction.

**Principle #2: Be Invitational**

For more than a century, Americans have been told that “news” is something practiced by professionals who all must think alike (except on the op/ed page), while the rest of us poor citizen slobs can write a letter once every month to voice our ideas, questions, or concerns. We at Vermont Commons challenge this restrictive approach, and instead invite active participation from our readers. “We are a print and online forum for exploring the idea of Vermont independence – political, economic, social, and spiritual,” explains our website. “We are unaffiliated with any other organization or media, and interested in all points of view. We welcome your writing, photos, thoughts, and participation.”

Our advice to aspiring 21st-century newspaper publishers: be invitational – early and often.

**Principle #3: Focus on Place and Commons:**

In an era dominated by “placeless news” that is aggregated, packaged, and sold by everyone from Gannett to Google, Vermont Commons focuses on the goings-on within a single politically identifiable place – the once and future republic of Vermont – and its relationship with the rest of the world. We also adhere to a twin focus: 1) economic re-localization and the idea of “the Commons,” and 2) political decentralization and Vermont independence. Our readers expect articles and commentary in each of our print issues and on our website that deals directly with these two themes, and we try not to disappoint.

**Principle #4: Be Civically Minded and Solutions-Oriented:**

We seek out writers (with a focus on Vermont wordsmiths) and ask them to submit their work to us for publication as unpaid citizen journalists, chronicling solutions-oriented work being done by Vermonters across the state. Not all of our
writers agree with our whole mission statement, and this (we hope) makes for interesting reading. We’ve also been fortunate, as a news journal committed to providing lengthy and literate writing rather than dumbed-down “McNews,” in attracting nationally recognized writers to publish within our pages.

Our website explains it this way:

Vermont Commons: Voices of Independence news journal and web site publish articles and opinion written by citizen journalists doing the good work required of us on a wide variety of fronts—energy, agriculture, local currency, education, land use, localvores, media, and more—by writers as diverse as Frank Bryan, Hazel Henderson, John Mc Claughry, Robin McDermott, Bill McKibben, Kirkpatrick Sale, Catherine Austin Fitts, Peter Forbes, George Schenk, and James Howard Kunstler. Some of our writers advocate nonviolent secession, others do not, while still others are on the fence. All of our writers, though, are fierce champions of localism and decentralization. These visionaries are helping us imagine a more sustainable and self-reliant Vermont future into which we can invest our time, energy, and financial and spiritual resources.

Principle #5: Championing the Paradox of Fierce Subjectivity and Non-Partisanship:

Our news journal makes no pretense towards “Objectivity,” which, as many media scholars have pointed out, is often synonymous with “Big Business/Empire friendly.” Instead, we’ve made a conscious decision to model Vermont Commons: Voices of Independence after the fiercely subjective 19th-century republican newspapers in the newly created United States.

We begin by articulating three central political tenets:

1. We at Vermont Commons: Voices of Independence believe that the United States is no longer a republic governed by its citizens, but an Empire that is immoral and essentially un governable.

2. We believe that a sovereign state’s right to nonviolently secede, first championed in the United States by the citizens of 19th-century New England, is a right that demands re-exploration in the 21st century.

3. We believe that a 21st-century Vermont, working in concert with our neighbors and the rest of the world, may better be able to feed, power, educate and care for its citizens as an independent 21st-century commonwealth/republic than as one of 50 states within the U.S. Empire. The “endless war on terror” being waged by the United States for geo-strategic control of the world’s remaining fossil fuel energy resources—“full spectrum dominance”—cannot and will not alter the emergent 21st-century reality of peak oil and climate change.

So—Vermont Commons begins with a clear, distinct, and subjective point of view. We also try to balance this viewpoint with a non-partisan approach, seeing our news journal as a “big tent” for a variety of voices from a wide range of political perspectives—liberal, conservative, progressive, libertarian, and decentralist/mutualist among them.

Our website’s mission statement captures all of these characteristics in a single sentence: Vermont Commons is “solutions-oriented, non-partisan, and interested in promoting ongoing and vigorous debate about a more sustainable future for the once and future republic of Vermont, and the world.”

Principle #6: Blend Old and New Media

Tech Apps

This is vital. Vermont Commons is committed to remaining a bi-monthly print-based publication, because we believe that universal citizen access to a free print-based publication available for pick-up in a wide variety of Vermont locations—bars, coffeehouses, libraries, gas stations, grocery stores, businesses, nonprofits—is critical, and because we believe in the vitality of print news to generate public discussion and debate in what Jurgen Habermas once called “the public sphere.”

We are not print dinosaurs, however. Vermont Commons has embraced the Internet and new social and digital media technologies as ways to provide up-to-the-minute news and commentary for our readers, reaching much wider audiences, both locally and globally. With this in mind, we employ more than one dozen volunteer bloggers (a roster that is growing), actively use new media technologies like RSS feeds, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, and offer our website visitors free access to each issue of our news journal in an easy-to-navigate digital e-reader format. In these ways, we hope to reach as many interested readers as possible with our “both/and” approach to distributing news and commentary.

Principle #7: Collaborative Funding

Paying for a news journal, of course, is always a challenge. As a not-for-profit, we keep our costs low, leverage free media technologies and volunteer writers as best as we can, barter with supportive content providers, and pay three staff members—our editor, managing editor, and layout designer—for modest salaries on a “per issue” basis. As a not-for-profit, we also rely on funding from multiple sources, including generous individuals, subscriptions, and advertising from Vermont-based businesses and nonprofits. Our immediate goal is to be 50-percent advertising-funded by the end of 2010, and continue to grow our subscription base. We are also experimenting with a “co-op commons” model for subscribers that we hope will bear fruit in the months ahead.

Conclusion

We are under no illusions. The road ahead, for both the news business and the citizens of the United States of Empire, will be long and difficult. But we believe in the power of honest, regular, independent, accessible, and provocative news and commentary to shape citizen thought, feeling, and action over time.

The 21st-century world is shaping up to look little like the 20th, and we need to prepare ourselves for the changes ahead. “Every empire, every too-big thing, fragments or shrinks according to its own unique character and to the age of history to which it belongs,” explains Wall Street Journal writer Paul Starobin, author of After America: Narratives for the Next Global Age, in a recent editorial entitled “Divided We Stand.” “America’s return to its origins could turn out to be an act of creative political destruction, with ‘we the people’ the better for it.”

Here in the Green Mountains, we’re more interested in creation than in destruction. In addition to Vermont Commons (as of this stick season 2010 writing), we now host a digital radio station called “Free Vermont Radio,” are circulating a statement of principles focused on the re-localized production of finance, fuel, food, and other resources, and are running (at least) 10 candidates for statewide office, including our gubernatorial candidate, Dennis Steele, and our lieutenant gubernatorial candidate, Peter Garritano. While we don’t pretend to have all the answers, the Vermont independence movement, full of questions, impulses, and entrepreneurial energy, is well underway.

Free Vermont! Long live the UNtied States.
So how did a smart young dude like you find yourself the campaign manager for Dennis Steele, arguably the most radical anti-war state candidate in the United States, and a secessionist to boot?
Matthew Cropp: I'd been sympathetic to the secession movement since my college days, and had met Dennis briefly at the 2008 convention in Montpelier, which I filmed for the public-access show that I've been doing for the past few years. When the first rumors that he might run surfaced, I invited him on for an interview, and we hit it off pretty well. After exchanging some messages back and forth, he asked in December if I'd be interested in being the campaign manager for his run. After a bit of thought I agreed, and the rest is history.

What draws you to the idea of Vermont independence?
MC: Justice and scale. Externally, the U.S. government's violent and aggressive foreign policy has served to, either directly or indirectly, violate the rights of millions of people across the globe, and has thus been a powerful tool for the perpetuation of injustice. Internally, the ever-increasing pool of resources the federal government controls has become a source of wealth and privilege by which the well-connected rip off and subjugate the majority of Americans through the game of interest-group politics. The bank bailouts were a visible manifestation of this deep-seated problem, which is woven into the very fabric of the contemporary federal system.

A solution to both of these grave injustices can be found in the scale of the polity that would result from Vermont’s independence. In terms of foreign policy, our resources would be withdrawn from funding the American Empire, and we would be large enough to adequately ensure our own security while still being too small to become a threat to others. Additionally, little importance. Rather, the defining factor lies in face-to-face campaigning and personal trust; if a legislator betrays that trust, a few friends willing to knock on doors and a few hundred dollars for fliers and yard signs is all that's required to effect a changing of the guard. In Congress, politicians can institute policies which benefit the few at the expense of the many with relative impunity thanks to the re-election-buying resources of said few. By contrast, the legislators of a Free Vermont would face a much more uncertain future should they succumb to the temptation of such behavior.

What do you think makes Dennis Steele a compelling gubernatorial candidate for an independent Vermont?
MC: His honesty, energy, and passion. Through working with him, I’ve come to appreciate the fact that, when Dennis commits to something, he does so with his whole being. When he was being excluded from gubernatorial forums early in the campaign, instead of reacting with self-pity and frustration, he treated his exclusion as a problem to be solved. As a result, he raised the stakes at each forum with questions from the floor until that fateful night in Barre when he was led out in handcuffs. Shortly thereafter, he was invited to his first forum, and the campaign rapidly grew into what is by far the most recognizable and active independent candidacy in the race. I feel that, were he elected governor, he would bring that same implacable spirit to the task of confronting the injustices that Vermonters face and working to build a better Vermont.

Tell our readers what you’ve learned on the campaign trail this year, in Vermont.
MC: Perhaps the most important thing I’ve learned has been the true diversity of supporters of an independent Vermont. Given its visibl-
ity, the Steele campaign has been a magnet for people who support the idea but have been inactive up until now. Every week, we’ve had new people from across the state and the political spectrum sending us e-mails or calling us up to show their support and to ask how to help. For me, this has really hammered home the idea that the Free Vermont movement is about more than any particular narrow political vision; rather, it’s about empowering the people of our state to honestly advocate and debate real solutions to the challenges we face.

How have you gone about raising money for the Steele campaign?
MC: We’ve pretty much relied upon the generosity of small donors from Vermont, as well as a few sympathizers from other parts of the country. We’ve gotten a fair share of funds through the website, and “Meet and Greet” events have been another good place to pick up a few dollars. As of the time of this interview, however, our totals remain in the four figures, which means our campaign tactics have had to be fundamentally different than those of the million-plus-dollar duopoly candidates. Luckily, this is a small state, and I feel like we’ve gotten far more bang for our buck than the Ds and Rs. It remains to be seen how things will play out during the campaign’s end-game.

You’ve gotten flak from other Vermont independence supporters, including me, for pushing “Anti-Israel” talking points on the campaign trail with Dennis. What do you make of this debate about strategy and tactics?
MC: I certainly understand the uneasiness many within the Free Vermont movement have expressed about our decision to include a critique of the federal government military subsidies and support for Israel in the campaign’s talking points. The pro-Israel lobby has gone to great pains to cultivate an intellectual environment in which any critic of the Israeli state can be branded an “anti-Semite” with relative ease, and indeed we have seen a few folks react that way. However, a major foundation of our campaign is a critique of the American Empire, and it’s impossible to fully discuss that topic without bringing up Israel. Indeed, the 9/11 attacks, which sent hundreds of thousands of American soldiers into the Middle East and squandered more than a trillion dollars under the guise of the “Global War on Terror,” were partially inspired by American support for Israel. The fact is that, beneath the well-funded propaganda that Israel is our only democratic, liberal friend in the Middle East, it is actually a racist, apartheid state which is engaged in both ethnic cleansing and policies that disturbingly resemble eugenics (of which the Law of Return is an excellent example).

What’s more, such policies are supported by U.S. military aid, implemented with American-made weapons, and defended in the U.N. Security Council by the U.S. veto. This is not only an example of the federal government’s support for a truly grave international injustice, but it is also a policy that makes Americans fundamentally less safe. If one of the primary purposes of government is to ensure the security of its constituents, American support for Israel is an unparalleled example of the federal government’s failure to fulfill what is supposed to be one of its most basic roles.

What’s the most exciting moment you’ve had on the campaign trail?
MC: A few weeks ago, there was an event in Burlington put on by the Vermont Young Professionals in which a panel of Vermont media professionals discussed their coverage of the campaign. We sent out a call to supporters and, as a result, at least a third of the event’s audience was wearing Dennis Steele for Governor pins. It was incredible to see the physical manifestation of the support that had built up in the time since the campaign began in January. It certainly seemed to catch the media representatives’ eyes as well; we got more media attention in the subsequent few days than we’d had in the previous month, and in the moment it felt like the movement for a Free Vermont had just reached an entirely new level.

What’s the biggest mistake you think the Steele campaign has made?
MC: It took us a long time to develop a really effective strategy for consistently reaching out to the media. I feel like we started the campaign with a sense that the media were more-or-less omniscient, and if they weren’t paying attention to the campaign it was because they were making the conscious choice to ignore us. We later learned that the media are likely to pay attention and show up if explicitly invited through press releases, etc., but I feel that, in the time before we realized that, several good opportunities for positive press exposure were missed.

What do you see for the Vermont independence movement down the road?
MC: It’s my hope that the networks of support that we’ve worked hard to cultivate since January can continue to expand and strengthen after the election into a growing movement for a Free Vermont. The form that movement takes is still very much open to debate and discussion; personally, I hope to see a political party, but there are a number of good ideas that have been floated by various people. Underlying it all is the fact that this campaign has created a new level of momentum and visibility for the idea of Vermont independence. If secession supporters seize this opportunity by stepping forward and putting in the time, energy, ideas, and resources that are required to build a vibrant independence movement, I believe there will be a real possibility that we’ll eventually find ourselves living under the green, white, and blue.

Thanks for your time, Matt, and good luck.
MC: Thanks you, and Free Vermont!
Editorial, continued from page 2

Fear – and deceit.

The monetary and human costs of the 60-year-old U.S. policy of perpetual war have now grown so enormous, however, that there is growing reason to believe it cannot continue. As the Greenneck advises us in these pages: “We are in the November of our nation.”

Are we ready for winter?

The Democratic and Republican parties here in Vermont and in the United States, who run the civilian infrastructure of the largest employer in the state and in the nation – that is, the government itself – are not even discussing the coming oil shocks. (The un-elected U.S. military, on the other hand, is, as are other major militaries.) The author of the highly regarded 2005 Hirsch Report (DOE), Robert Hirsch, in an interview last month warned that “the impending decline of world oil production… is likely in the next two to five years.” The absolute decline of all liquid fuels will be experienced as shortages. Prices will soar.

As if to back up Hirsch, the September Scientific American predicted an irreversible decline in world oil production would begin in 2014. Peak oil soon will be, if it already isn’t in the West, a force for “continual contraction.” The German military peak oil report leaked in July 2010 spoke forthrightly of the collapse of the globalized economy, and in particular its impact on the Western economies, marked by hyperinflation (loss of faith in national currencies), interrupted trade and supply chains, government defaults, and diminished investment (growth).

In other words, the world economy is a complex system that is going to scale down and re-localize. Soon.

Not business as usual. Not the business of duly elected Dems and Repubs.

Last May we had another visitor from a distant shore, Michael Ruppert, who appeared on WDEV, Vermont’s largest independently owned commercial radio station. Several callers upbraided him for believing Vermont could become independent, feed itself, provide its own electricity, heat, health care, transportation system, and so forth. We live, according to one or two vehement callers in particular, in a wintery hard land that has little to offer in the way of resources for self-sufficiency much less a modern lifestyle. That was that.

I wondered: Looking back, were we Vermonters in fact so helpless? Were we so needy and covetous of Washington’s “aid” (and Wall Street’s “credit”)? And are we really so helpless, now and looking ahead?

In his “Vox Pop” interview with Rob Williams, Matthew Cropp suggests that secession, or sovereign independence, “presents a great unknown, and most people rationally won’t sacrifice perceived stability for an uncertain future.” (My italics.) In this same issue Ben Falk outlines a wide range of troubling-to-benign future scenarios for readers to weigh, to prod us to more sharply to question the Democratic and Republican business-as-usual approach to living and voting in Vermont. Falk surmises, “Post-peak oil living will likely have much in common with pre-oil-age living.” Indeed!

Just how compromised are we Vermonters, were we to once again strive to be self-sufficient and withal, yet again, independent? Can we, for instance, heat and feed ourselves in our forbidding climate without relying on the Pentagon to bring home our oil, or on California, Florida, Mexico and other far-flung lands to give us our daily bread?

According to “Energy Optimist” Gaelan Brown, there’s enough renewable energy in the form of wood and woodchips to heat all of Vermont’s buildings and in the process repatriate $700,000,000 for Vermonters to spend and invest in Vermont. Or we can stay the course and continue to follow Leahy, Sanders, and Welch down the corridors of power to nowhere, pulling in big “defense” contracts such as the F-35 warplanes and the nuclear weapons lab, Sandia Corp, or the head of the USDA fronting for GMO giants like Monsanto to help guarantee Vermonters heating oil, jobs, and food security.

Did Vermonters have a poor quality of life before Uncle Sam came to trod so heavily on their land, sometime after World War II? Could they grow food enough to feed themselves? The evidence suggests they could – and could again. Vermont produced more sheep, rye, beef, and potatoes in 1840 than today; more dried peas and beans, wheat, and hogs in 1850 than today; more oats (1880), barley (1890), corn and apples (1900), poultry and pears (1910), plums (1920), cherries and strawberries (1940), and eggs (1960) than it does today.

All that food production was achieved 50 to 170 years ago. Has the land that once made it possible vanished? Has the knowledge needed entirely faded from our cultural memory? Has the potential of human will atrophied beyond our recall?

If East Thetford’s Long Wind Farm can supply most of Vermont and New Hampshire, and many places elsewhere throughout the northeast, with tomatoes from February to November, if Pete’s Greens farm in Craftsbury can grow 200 vegetables for that northern Vermont region, including winter storage crops like beets, cabbage, carrots, turnips, potatoes, winter squash, garlic, etc., if our frigid state can give birth to over a dozen vintners in a decade, well, just what are the limits to self-reliance that Vermonters face?

I suggest: few. Very few. And they reside not in the land, but in us.

So, what are the limits to self-reliance that Vermonters face?

I suggest very few. And they reside not in the land, but in us.

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Introduction, continued from page 1
the hubristic was only the overture. The dissolution is yet to be played out, though the plot thickened and union thinned early in the first year of the presidency of Barack Obama, who continued the Bush policy of socializing risk and privatizing reward in his series of bailouts of corporate entities that were, in the obscenely inverse phrase of the media mass, “too big to fail.” The phrase reeked of wishful thinking, though it conveyed with great effectiveness the mindset of those who run the empire. Bigness is next to godliness, which is in turn a subsidiary of Goldman Sachs; smallness is mingly and negligible; and modesty is for losers. Ten thousand corner delis must die so that AIG can live. The political corollary is that Xenia, Ohio, and Fairbanks, Alaska, are nothings, fit only to send tribute in the form of taxes to Washington and future corpses to the war of the hour. The fifty stars of Old Glory are no more than smudge marks on a wet rag; what counts is the octopus in the District of Columbia whose tentacles curl out to smother strangle and steal from the nether provinces.

As the empire accelerates through its welcome strain of decay, real patriots of all shades and shapes will hold with renewed and redoubled fastness to the cherishable pieces of our lorn and lovely land: its little places, its accented regions, its history-echoing, blood-seeded grounds.

The times – the Times, too – push me to the rocks off Lake Ontario’s Point Breeze, where I sit licking an ice cream cone and pondering, blood-seeded grounds. I heard the voice arising demanding bards By them all native and grand, by them alone can these States be fused into the compact organism of a Nation. To hold men together by paper or seal or by compulsion is no account . . . 3

Paper, seal, compulsion: These are the ties that strangle, not bind. I love America deeply but the country I love is far too small to show up on a tele-vision screen. The idea of “citizenship” has been diluted from one of membership in an organic body in which each person matters and takes part in civic affairs to the current condition, in which you are a cog in a machine, just another brick in the wall. The role of an American citizen, as viewed by our rulers in Washington, D.C., is to pay your taxes, cast a meaningless vote every four years, and shut the hell up.

The anti-Obama reaction of 2009 was like a controlled burn that blew past its carefully constructed boundaries. Republican operatives had hoped to exploit popular unhappiness over the new president’s (typical, even Bush-like) acts of aggrandizement and power grabbing to set up the GOP for a rebound in 2010. But the rubes wandered off the reservation, past the barbed-wire fences of Responsible (which is to say eunuchlike) Dissent and into the Forbidden Zone of revolution, refusal, even . . . secession.

By spring 2009 radicalism spiced the air. States from Michigan to New Hampshire were considering “state sovereignty” resolutions that audaciously reasserted the Tenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution: “The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.” Since both parties – two wings of a single bird of prey – and the corporate media that serve them regard anyone who questions the Bill of Rights as a militiaman (occupying the same rung of the social ladder as a white-trash meth head), this seemingly innocuous act – declaring, in the face of all evidence, that the U.S. Constitution is operative – had the flavor of sedition. And the sovereignty resolutions, once unpacked, left a great question hanging in the air: What if Washington tells the states to shove off? Don’t mind your own business, Montana and Oklahoma: Uncle Sam will mind it for you. What then? The choices, it would seem, are two: submission or secession. And given that choice, what man or woman of hale and hearty spirit would not choose secession?

Even dullard politicians caught the fever, or at least mimicked its symptoms. On Income Tax Day, April 15, 2009, that annual reminder of our serfdom, the empty-suited Governor Rick Perry of Texas, a man theretofore so unremarkable as to have languished in the shadow of his predecessor, George W. Bush, addressed a raucous crowd in Austin (many shouting “Secede!”) and later told reporters, “We’ve got a great union. There’s absolutely no reason to dissolve it. But if Washington continues to thumb their nose at the American people, you know, who knows what might come out of that? But Texas is a very unique place, and we’re a pretty independent lot to boot.”

Inarticulate, to be sure. And where was Perry when President Bush and Dick Cheney were shredding the Constitution for the previous eight years? But still: Something was abrew. Our birthword and birthgift – secession, which had been removed from our vocabulary when we were but a young country – was on the tongues of the unregulated, the unbossed, the unruly. Perry was pilloried, naturally. No unapproved opinion may be expressed in the land of the free without earning the sayer thereof his time on the cross. Who should come to Perry’s defense but the most radical and honest presidential hopeful of the prior year, Representative Ron Paul (R-TX), the libertarian scourge of war, militarism, statism, and Big Brother? “Secession is an American tradition – it’s how we came into being,” said Paul, continued on page 29
In my work the lines between planning a landscape and planning a lifestyle are becoming increasingly blurred. From continuing climate shifts, to peak oil, to national bankruptcy, and the various instabilities these set in motion, sound planning looks ahead and aims to respond ahead of the curve – where response is most strategic (before the flood, before the well dries up, before the dollar is worthless, before a gallon of gas is six bucks). It’s clear that landscapes will need to be adaptive to hotter temperatures, longer drought and/or flood cycles, increased deposition of toxic pollutants in the atmosphere, increased pests, and other ecological factors.

It’s also becoming increasingly clear that our lifestyles must adapt to these and other emerging conditions, as well. We’ve modeled potential climate shifts to aid our planning, but it’s more difficult to model cultural shifts – economic, social, and political changes that ultimately determine what ways of living are more or less viable.

And viability – or more accurately, resiliency – is what we’re after. That means responding ahead of the actual event, swinging the bat before the ball whizzes by. Although present leadership seems to fail in the extreme at this art, we had better get good at anticipating change before we’re kicked off this big blue island for good. Indeed, responding deftly to changing conditions is at the core of successful adaptive responses in all creatures great and small on this particular planet. This holds true for individuals as well as species. To be adaptive we must extrapolate current conditions into specific future conditions that guide our planning. Since we can’t predict the exact future, we have to entertain diverse scenarios and plan around a selection of them. This article briefly explores a dozen or so that seem more or less likely.

American society in the coming years will likely be some combination of the scenarios below. Take your pick of not only the most likely, but of those most likely to yield positive results for your life. Which ones are most strategic to bet on? In other words, even if they do not come to pass, which ones are you better off for having planned for, “as if?”

**America’s possible futures:**

- A prosperous nation that Raced to the Top, leads the globe in clean-tech innovation, powered by a smart grid and hydrogen fuel cells, made friends with China and India, and paid off its debts;
- A society of debtors in which America and Americans owe even more than they do at present (household debt of $117,951, federal government owing $13.5 trillion and counting);
- Lack of a middle class, like all bankrupt nations eventually;
- A land of widespread poverty, crime, corruption, and security challenges, where “making a living” means dealing with basics of life instead of simply waking up and heading to work, turning money into a living;
- Far more polluted, as American industry returns home after a century of extraction abroad, with the toxicity and disease complimenting such a shift;
- A society that turned away from the ethos of the radical consumer, where people became producers instead; with values that encouraged thrift and savings, investing in long-term family, community, and national peace and prosperity, rather than focusing on short-term amusements and personal power;
- A wasteland a la The Road, where the few remaining humans scavenge one another for food;
- A place where everything from a gallon of gas, food, clothes, and nearly every other consumer good is far more expensive and at times, a lot less available, causing extreme difficulty for a nation that produced, but did not prepare for, such conditions;
- An economy in which science and technology (nuclear energy, nanotech, robots, transgenic engineering, etc.) made it possible to maintain radical consumerism on (incredibly), a sustainable basis – the ultimate American Dream realized with no limits: Consumerism fully manifest and reconciled (we’re saved by Monsanto, Dow, and BP);
- Currency in hyperinflation, and a return to durable goods and services as standards of value;
- Without public services that are today considered standard, significant anarchy and lawlessness, mob-rule in the poorest cities;
- A Chinese territory;
- A constellation of nation-states in which localized economic and cultural structures developed as a response to the centralization of federal power in the former United States during the 19th, 20th, and early 21st centuries;
- A continent similar to Germany during the rise of the Third Reich, with attempts to rid the country of accumulating social problems by scapegoating specific groups and “cleansing” society;
- Amid the wasteland of a medium-sized asteroid collision with Earth, only some insects and rodents remain;
- A military force stretched further than ever, with a draft and world-war-style living conditions, in nationalistic fervor fighting hundreds of terrorist cells;
- A classic Malthusian-checked scenario, complete with struggles to recover from large hurricanes, global fly pandemic, a catastrophic earthquake in California, critical water shortages in the West,
displaced people by the hundreds of thousands, several coordinated terrorist bombings of nuclear power plants adjacent to major U.S. cities, and forces fighting on the ground in North Korea, Iran, Afghanistan, and Iraq, with the remaining battling protestors and constant petty crime in American cities;

- Post-nuclear attack and counter-attack with Iran, North Korea, China, and/or other nations;
- Similar to 2010 but everything shifted a bit further toward second- and third-world conditions; much like the U.S.S.R. after its most-recent collapse.

Take a moment and try to imagine in detail each of these and other potential futures you may be aware of. It’s scary as hell, I know. But clear visualization helps, as it does for athletic performances; this time, though, it’s your actual life that is unfolding before you. As the details of each possibility unfold in your mind various possible actions pop up: “Get to know the new neighbors!” “Build a bomb shelter!” “Buy gold and guns!” “Move closer to Mom!” “Get the F out of the U.S.!” “Get out of Vegas!” “Learn nanotech!” “Learn Mandarin!” “Learn to grow food!” Etc., etc.

Pick the scenarios you think are most likely to happen and are most likely to encourage the kind of planning in your life that will be beneficial to you and your family/community whether those scenarios come to pass or not – e.g., learning how to grow a garden saved you money, made you healthier, and was educational for the kids even though the national food system ended up not collapsing after all.

To aid in this process I have included three diagrams that are customized to post-peak oil changes and results that I think are likely. They show how such shifts might affect ways of allocating time, money, and energy resources. One of the diagrams looks specifically at food systems and the role each aspect of one’s nourishment plays in both a pre-peak oil and post-peak oil period. (Keep in mind that the pre-peak oil aspects shown are those immediately pre-peak, as in the last generation or so; before that, the assets and resources shown are strikingly similar to post-peak allocations; for example, producing one’s own food was often crucial long before peak-oil – say, from the 19th century backward – just as it is likely to be in the post-peak age. In fact, post-peak oil living will likely have much in common with pre-oil-age living.)

Keep in mind, as well, that these diagrams are specific to rural cold-climate places like Vermont. You may want to develop your own asset-allocation diagram, specific to your physical setting, skills, resources, and beliefs about the future.

Despite the impossibility of predicting the exact future, there’s one truth rational people can plan around: the simple fact that the future will be different from both the past and the present. History bears the same lesson perennially: change is the only constant, and magnitude of change tends to be greatly underestimated by most of humanity most of the time.

Consider that as you plan. We tend toward mental inertia, fail to see forces of change, are blind to the depth of possible change and its velocity. Recall the highly educated, cultured and communal Jews of Germany who could have left the ghetto but refused, reasoning that “someone” would save them, and that “it can’t get that bad.” The stories of the death camps were too distant a departure from “normal” to be believed. After all, there was little precedent for what was happening.

Such is history. Human beings are predisposed to assume unchanging normality – a source of fundamental mistakes in planning and action. Strategic planners see their normalcy biases for what they are and move beyond them, learn to think outside of them. An intelligent, anticipatory response requires us to glance backward into history while simultaneously visualizing a desirable future and acting toward that.

Scary? Yes. Exciting? Indeed. This is not a boring journey. There’s no “standing still on a moving train” and this big blue world happens to be one fast-moving string of boxcars. Hold on tight, anticipate what the derailing forces are, the specifics of the pile-up ahead, and respond accordingly. Simply jumping off the train is not a solution in of itself – though it may be the most important first step you can take. •
Bye Bye Miss American Empire
by Bill Kauffman
Chelsea Green, 2010

The conventional story of American democracy celebrates the “empire of liberty” (to use Jefferson’s own phrase) that spread democratic ideals across a continent and beyond. Each new star added to the flag and each war fought to save the Union or its ideals generally are considered to be necessary steps in a historical march toward freedom. Yet, throughout American history and increasingly in the current political climate, a dissenting minority has challenged the assumption that an empire can promote liberty or democracy. These critics of expansionism argue that whenever the mechanisms of governance become too far removed from the distinctive concerns and cultures of local and regional communities, the tendency—allways—is toward the centralization and concentration of power at the expense of genuine, participatory democracy.

In Bye Bye Miss American Empire, Bill Kauffman illuminates this neglected thread of American history. He asserts that “We are a nation born in secession, consecrated to the right of a free people to rule themselves, and our inherited radicalism has never quite been extinguished.” He shows that in the early years of the republic, citizens and political leaders, especially in New England, had second thoughts about the political consolidation of the states as they saw sectional rivalry develop between North and South, and westward expansion accelerate. Before the Civil War linked secession, in the national mind, to the violent defense of slavery, it was northern abolitionists who insisted that the Union be sundered so that free states would not be obligated to enforce the Fugitive Slave Law. Many argued that turning the North into a refuge for escaped slaves would hasten the demise of the anachronistic institution. Kauffman resurrects these long-forgotten voices and muses that the “general and peaceful abolition” they envisioned would have been preferable to the wholesale slaughter of the Civil War.

The author, who began his career as an aide to U.S. Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, now considers himself “a cheerful enemy of the empire.” He has supported candidates as diverse as George McGovern, Ralph Nader, and Ron Paul; no simple political label describes his libertarian/agrarian/localist philosophy, which he has explored through his nine books and numerous articles, and which generally appear in conservative publications. Here, Kauffman engages in an historical and geographical journey to local and regional secession movements in New York, Michigan’s upper peninsula, western Kansas, the great plains, northern California, Texas, Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, the contemporary South, and, of course, Vermont. Kauffman introduces the players and clearly explains the issues that sparked their activism. He shows that there is no uniform ideology motivating movements for separatism and decentralization; they are rooted in local conditions and the perception that local interests and cultures are disregarded by distant policymakers. These narratives suggest several core concerns that give rise to secessionist sentiment.

First, the population of the U.S. and its larger states has grown far beyond the scale of representative democracy. On several occasions, Kauffman points out some unsettling numbers: each member of Congress “represents” an average of 647,000 citizens, and the average district in the California state assembly contains 475,000. California has as many people as the smallest 22 states combined, but has two senators to a combined 44 representing the same number of voters in those states. In what meaningful sense do “the people” rule themselves?

Second, the continent comprises diverse bioregions and cultures with distinct social, economic and political interests, and even within states there are substantially different interests that are often in conflict. Kauffman, a native of upstate New York, explores in some detail the domination of the state’s politics by New York City and its suburbs. In theory (according to James Madison in The Federalist Papers) a constitutional republic functions best when there are diverse “factions” countering each other’s power. Secession movements are not opposed to diversity as such, but to situations where some interests have acquired such disproportionate power that they have no need to accommodate local communities or cultures.

Third, the unchecked concentration of power breeds the evils of imperialism and militarism. As the radical writer Randolph Bourne observed...
at the outbreak of World War One, “war is the health of the state.” All of America’s wars of expansion and defense of “democracy” resulted in further concentration of authority in the national government and a tighter partnership between government and industry. As Kauffman puts it, with characteristic wit: “If Marin County wants to serve joints with school lunches and Tupelo, Mississippi, wants the ‘Ten Commandments’ in the classroom, well that’s up to the people of Marin and Tupelo. Ain’t none of my business. Yours, either.”

Kauffman acknowledges that extremists and wackos, including unrepentant racists, are scattered among secession movements, but insists that they are a small minority and do not define the groups’ mission. He demonstrates convincingly that secession is not about race.

empire demands “that we pledge allegiance to the distant over the near, to the abstract over the real, to perpetual war over peace and harmony.” He sheds light on another neglected chapter in American history – the late 19th and early 20th centuries when the nation made a deliberate choice to pursue overseas military and economic dominance. The choice was contested (who knew, as Kauffman tells us, that Grover Cleveland was an anti-imperialist hero?), but empire prevailed, with significant consequences for the character of national government (and the eventual addition of Alaska and Hawaii to the Union, which Kauffman sardonically questions).

Fourth, secessionism reflects a “live and let live” attitude; those drawn to secession do not want to be dominated by superior or distant powers, but neither do they want to turn the tables and dominate others. Kauffman describes conversations between “conservatives” and “liberals” at the first secessionist convention (hosted by the Middlebury Institute and the Second Vermont Republic in Burlington in 2006) in which people simply accepted each other’s different values and agreed that their common enemy was enforced conformity. Kauffman summarized this attitude ultimately, he says, “Trust local people. That, really, is the soul of the case for secession.”

Race baiting

But this friendly libertarianism has gotten secessionists, particularly here in Vermont, into trouble. Progressives point out that it took the authority of the federal government, overruling the parochial prejudices of local people, to end slavery and later segregation, to establish workers’ rights and equality for women, to guarantee free speech and separation of church and state, to protect wilderness and the environment, and so on. To reject this authority, and leave such matters up to local cultures – particularly the more conservative culture in “red” states – is to retreat from the ideals of liberal democracy. The common shorthand for this critique is to accuse Vermont secessionists of being “racist.” The charge is absolutely erroneous, but it continues to dog the movement here.

Kauffman addresses this issue head on. He writes extensively about the League of the South and other conservative decentralist movements. He has spoken with their activists and asked point-blank about their views on race. They largely persuaded him, as they did Vermont secessionists, that they embrace a multiracial society that guarantees equal rights, and welcome African Americans into their movement (though so far few have joined). Kauffman acknowledges that extremists and wackos, including unrepentant racists, are scattered among secession movements, but insists that they are a small minority and do not define the groups’ mission. He demonstrates convincingly that secession is not about race.

Still, it is true that communities like Tupelo across a wide swath of America would very likely post the Ten Commandments in public school classrooms and establish many other policies that Vermont progressives would find repugnant. I am myself a green/civil libertarian/progressive as well as a decentralist, and it troubles me to think of the Bill of Rights, environmental protection, and other social and political advances now enforced by the federal government seriously compromised if that authority is dissolved.

But secessionism challenges us to consider what price we pay for entrusting a massive, distant, corporate-serving, imperial government with the power to overrule regional cultures and local communities. We may have reached a point where the benefits no longer justify their cost. Perhaps, just perhaps, it makes sense to trust local people more than the technocrats and war profiteers who run the empire. This is an arguable point, and Vermont secessionists would be glad to debate it with their critics. The race baiting is neither relevant nor helpful.

Bye Bye Miss American Empire is a provocative, informative, and surprisingly entertaining book. Kauffman is part historical detective (and a very good one) and part droll commentator who tosses off sarcastic and irreverent observations at every opportunity. At times his vocabulary is annoyingly obscure, but after a while I found this, too, entertaining. Though he is sympathetic to secessionism, he is more journalist than ideologue, so that even those who are highly skeptical of secession will find this book engaging.
Oh, how I used to hate a Vermont November. The bleakness of its landscape, the trees leaf-bare and gray, flesh-striped bones against the sky. The rawness of the weather, the rain cold and unrelenting, wanting only to be snow but too often failing. The knowledge that it will be six months or more before the ground thaws and I can stoop in the garden to gather warm soil in my palm, a soft reminder of my vulnerability.

I cannot say when or how my dislike for the month shifted to an appreciation that is not quite love, but almost. I only know that it did. It is not November that changed, of course: It is I. There is still the rain and the cold, the endless unfinished projects that will soon be covered by snow and ice, a truth that is tolerable only because I lie to myself that come spring, I will bring them all to completion. I told myself the same lie last November. I will do it next.

But over the past years, I have come to recognize a certain clarity to the month that once eluded me. The leaves dead and fallen, the sky merely shades of a singular half-color, the chill of a rain-wet day spent gathering firewood or running fence or killing pigs: These things strip away all that is extraneous, and what remains is the sense that life can be at once far more difficult and far more beautiful than I’d previously imagined.

It may seem painfully obvious, but it has only just occurred to me: We are in the November of our nation. So many things so many of us took for granted, all the colors and hues and textures of excess, are eroding before our eyes. An unrelenting rain is falling on the frail shoulders of our country and it is doing what unrelenting things do: forcing us to relent.

It is not as if we had no choice; at one point, a point that has all but disappeared in the rear view mirror of the American dream, things might have turned out differently. But we chose not to choose then, and so now we cannot. What will happen now will happen, despite our fervent wishes that it not be so, that if only we vote for one candidate and not the other, if only we fight one war and not the other, if only we buy this and not that, we might be granted a return to something that feels a little more like what we’d come to assume was normal.

But of course it was normal in only the industrialized context of the past century – the age of oil, corporatism, and plenty for most. These were the leaves of the American summer, and now they are fast falling to the ground, where they will pile high and rot into the short history of our nation.

What remains will be difficult, at times damnably so. The winter that follows will extract its toll on us all. But within all that hardship – indeed, perhaps in part because of it – the elemental beauty of what it means to be alive on this earth will emerge against the backdrop of gray. At some point, years or even decades from now, our culture will begin to recognize and appreciate this truth. Then, and only then, will the thaw begin.
The first time I heard the term “winter vegetable” I thought that there must be a whole family of vegetables that I didn’t know about. Then I learned that winter vegetables are not necessarily grown in the winter, but rather they are grown in the summer and are stored for use in the winter. Winter vegetables include root vegetables, root vegetable mixes, root vegetable blends, root vegetable soup, root vegetable salad, and root vegetable bread. 

The beauty of these vegetables is that even if you don’t have a root cellar, chances are you have somewhere in your home that you can store them for several months. We store our winter vegetables in two different places. One place is a dark, dry room that is kept at 50-60 degrees Fahrenheit and never freezes. The other place is a metal cabinet in our garage that is kept at a constant 40-45 degrees Fahrenheit. The potatoes and cabbage sit in boxes and all of the other vegetables are buried in buckets of damp sand perforated with holes. Perhaps this isn’t the ideal way to store winter vegetables, but it works for us and we are usually still enjoying most of the veggies well into the late winter.

The biggest problem that I have found with winter vegetables isn’t storing them, but preparing them. Most people have a limited repertoire of recipes for winter vegetables and by mid-December are already craving a fresh salad of lettuce and tomatoes. Andrea Chesman wants to change the way that people look at winter vegetables, and has developed 270 fresh ways to enjoy winter vegetables in her latest book, *Recipes from the Root Cellar,* and her new cookbook *Eat Locally, Spice Globally.* 

Andrea pointed out that one of the reasons that people don’t like cooking with winter vegetables is that they tend to take a long time to cook. Her answer to that is a recipe for Shredded Vegetable Nora Rolls that takes just 10 minutes. She also has a recipe for Winter Minestrone that can be on the table in less than an hour yet tastes like it has been simmering on the stove all day. Andrea first learned to cook when she worked at a Chinese restaurant while in college. She says that having some basic Asian ingredients on hand can transform yet another boring meal of winter vegetables into something exciting. Among those pantry ingredients are Chinese chili paste with garlic, Hoisin sauce, mirin (a Japanese rice wine), oyster sauce, white wine, sesame oil, and soy sauce. These ingredients are used in many of her recipes such as Thai Vegetable Salad, Miso Noodle Bowl, and Sichaun-Style Stir-Fried Greens. Of course, on a really cold and snowy night, simple, humble roasted vegetables really hit the spot. Here are some tips from Andrea on how to make perfect roasted vegetables:

- Preheat the oven to 450 degrees (anything lower and you will just be baking the veggies).
- Oil the bottom of a large cookie sheet.
- Toss the cut-up veggies in oil. Do not season at this point.
- Spread the vegetables on the cookie sheet in a single layer. DO NOT CROWD THEM or they will steam and not roast. If necessary use two cookie sheets.
- Roast for about 40 minutes, stirring or shaking the pan occasionally for even cooking.
- Remove from the oven and sprinkle with kosher salt.
- Andrea says that she uses a generous amount of oil and feels that helps to develop the caramelization. The vegetables are cooked to a uniform size. Andrea likes to cut everything to a ½ inch dice. The benefit of a smaller dice is that the vegetables will roast more evenly and get more caramelized, which is what makes them so good.
- Andrea pointed out that one of the reasons that people don’t like cooking with winter vegetables is that they tend to take a long time to cook. Her answer to that is a recipe for Shredded Vegetable Nora Rolls that takes just 10 minutes. She also has a recipe for Winter Minestrone that can be on the table in less than an hour yet tastes like it has been simmering on the stove all day. Andrea first learned to cook when she worked at a Chinese restaurant while in college. She says that having some basic Asian ingredients on hand can transform yet another boring meal of winter vegetables into something exciting. Among those pantry ingredients are Chinese chili paste with garlic, Hoisin sauce, mirin (a Japanese rice wine), oyster sauce, white wine, sesame oil, and soy sauce. These ingredients are used in many of her recipes such as Thai Vegetable Salad, Miso Noodle Bowl, and Sichaun-Style Stir-Fried Greens. Of course, on a really cold and snowy night, simple, humble roasted vegetables really hit the spot. Here are some tips from Andrea on how to make perfect roasted vegetables:

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I've been studying the economics of firewood since I was six years old, when it was my job to fetch firewood from the woodshed. I consider myself a tree-hugger who believes that preserving our forest ecology should be a top priority. But Vermont’s best opportunity for environmentally sustainable energy independence is to replace our primary winter heating fuels – fuel oil and propane – with sustainably harvested firewood.

Here’s some good news: Vermont could heat 100 percent of our homes each year by harvesting less than 25 percent of the new growth generated in our forests each year. According to the Biomass Energy Resource Center and the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, the annual growth of Vermont forests equates to more than 9 million tons. That equates to 6 million cords of new wood generated each year by our forests. Nearly 80 percent of Vermont is forested and more than 80 percent of Vermont’s forests are privately owned.

If Vermont were to replace fuel oil and propane with local, sustainably harvested firewood by 2020, we would keep more than $700 million in Vermont’s local economy instead of sending that money to foreign petroleum companies.

Oh, and we’d also be doing our part to reduce greenhouse gases. Since the carbon emissions from burning wood are already part of the atmospheric carbon cycle, this carbon will be re-absorbed by the growth of new plants and trees. (Burning fossil fuels introduces geologic carbon into the atmosphere, but the carbon in trees is already part of the atmospheric cycle).

If all 250,000 Vermont households heated with wood, that would require between 1 million and 1.5 million cords of firewood per year, which is only 25 percent of the 6 million cords of new annual growth each year.

Guess what else? Every home that switches from propane to firewood would save more than $2,000 per year, at today’s prices. The average Vermont home that relies on fuel oil or propane is spending about $3,000 per year. The average Vermont home that heats with firewood is spending only $800 to $1,000 per year.

More dead wood rots in Vermont’s forest each year (emitting methane) than we harvest. While rotting wood does add nutrients to the forest soil, our forests are becoming less productive because they are clogged with overgrowth.

The chart on page 17 shows our 2010 heating-fuel mix, including costs, on a per-household basis. Vermont’s current mix of heat-fuel sources is from the State’s Department of Natural Resources website, and the cost-per Btu and efficiency information is from the EPA.

Fast-forward to 2020 in two scenarios:

1. We move to 75 percent of our residential heat from burning wood in high-efficiency stoves; we keep more than $700 million per year in the local economy; we create thousands of jobs; we actually spend less in 2020 on total heating fuel than we did in 2010.
2. We keep our current mix of fuel sources, importing almost all of our heating fuel; we see our annual heating costs nearly double (if we see only a 6-percent increase in fossil fuel costs per year) from $580 million per year to $980 million per year.
And of course it would be better if we could heat our homes without burning anything, perhaps with a Jean Pain Mound (described in this space in Vermont Commons’ Fall 2010 issue). Next winter I hope to do this myself.

But the propane-burning environmentalists in Vermont need to realize that burning trees is not necessarily bad; in fact, if we do this right, a transition to wood-fired heating in Vermont would dramatically improve our local economies, get us off of fossil fuels, and actually improve the health of our forests.

What kind of policy would best move Vermont down this path without damaging our environment? Vermont needs a reasonable 10-year incentive plan to encourage homes to install modern, efficient wood-burning stoves and furnaces. And we need forestland owners to have easy access to foresters, capital, and equipment to help them manage their forests sustainably while increasing the amount of firewood harvested.

The challenge is more about convenience than economics, since even today the average home that switches from propane/oil to wood will save $2,000 per year, and you can get a decent woodstove for $1,500. But people love their automatic furnaces. A thermostat-driven gasifying wood-boiler furnace, or a masonry stove, can cost $10,000 or more installed. But they are incredibly efficient and pay for themselves in five years. So this is an area where subsidies should be increased.

If Vermonters really value sustainable thermal-energy independence, there is one sure thing we can do: enact a retail tax on fuel oil and propane that will start at 5 percent and increase 5 percent more each year until 2020, and put that money into forest-management and wood-stove/furnace subsidy funds. This would give people a clear economic reason to switch to wood, and it would provide money to help cover the investments needed in heating-system upgrades and our forestry infrastructure.

I could go on about the virtues of wood-fired energy independence, but I have to get back to work stacking next year’s firewood with my six-year old son. This is some of the best quality time I get with my family. And I don’t need a gym membership anymore either, which saves me even more money.
Radio spectrum may be one of the most highly regulated naturally occurring resources of all time. From cell phones to remote controls, from TV sets to garage-door openers, virtually every wireless device depends on access to the wireless spectrum. Despite spectrum’s immeasurable importance in the information age, insiders have little incentive to disclose their information to the public, for the less the public knows about spectrum, the greater the insiders’ ability to profit. Indeed, one report quite accurately stated, “spectrum policy is too complicated for you to understand.”

Spectrum as we know it spans from 3 kilohertz (kHz) to 300 gigahertz (GHz), with an electronically audible range of 20kHz and above. Since the regulation of radio frequencies in the early 20th century, the spectrum has been subject to chronic limitations.

Pioneering regulators assumed that conflicting transmitters in any spectrum would lead to interference, which inadvertently led to the creation of artificial scarcity through regulation, now referred to as “the doctrine of spectrum scarcity.” With virtually every usable radio frequency already licensed to commercial operators and government entities, the world is experiencing a type of spectrum drought. Since the beginning of spectrum regulation, every new commercial service, from satellite broadcasting to wireless local-area networks, has created competition for licenses.

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A misconception that supports the current system of regulation is that the spectrum is a scarce and finite resource. Radio waves are freely transferred over the radio spectrum despite regulation. Therefore, when licensing spectrum rights, the FCC and the National Telecommunication and Information Administration (NTIA) control the right to deploy transmitters and receivers that operate in particular ways, not a piece of a finite resource. Consequently, the extent to which there appears to be a spectrum shortage largely depends on whether or not the technologies that can be deployed are available, but on the technologies that can be deployed. Regulations that are intended to create harmony on the airwaves instead create artificial limits on spectrum utilization, which creates massive inefficiency as many frequencies remain unused.

In the past, televisions and radios relied on tube receivers that required a frequency buffer to avoid intermixing channels. Today’s digital receivers are capable of utilizing “smart” technologies to pick out only the channels they need. Signal interference could soon be a thing of the past, which should make exclusive licenses unnecessary. This presents the possibility for an open-access commons with virtually no capacity limits and unlimited public access. Of course, this possibility is very unsettling for broadcasters, phone, and cable companies if implemented through flexible public licensing.

In the United States, the regulatory responsibility for spectrum is shared by the FCC and the NTIA. The FCC is responsible for managing the spectrum designated for non-federal use – i.e., state and local government, commercial, private, and personal use. The NTIA is a branch of the Department of Commerce responsible for spectrum designated for federal use (for example, the Army, FAA, and FBI). Interestingly, 66 percent of the spectrum below 3.1GHz (most valuable), and 95 percent of the spectrum below 300GHz, is designated for undisclosed government use.

Congress mandates that the FCC impose and collect application-processing fees to prescribe charges for certain types of application processing or authorization services it provides to communication entities over which it has jurisdiction. All application-processing fees are deposited in the U.S. Treasury as mandated by the Omnibus Reconciliation Act of 1989. The FCC also collects regulatory fees to recover the annual cost of enforcement, policy- and rule-making, user information, and international activities. Regulatory fees became standard after the Omnibus Reconciliation Act of 1993 in Section 9 of the Communications Act. The regulatory fees do not...
apply to government entities, amateur radio operators, and nonprofit entities (college, religious, public). In FY2017 there were 10,806 registered for-profit licenses, totaling $21,168,225 in regulatory fees paid to the FCC.

Fifty-four for-profit licensees paid a total of $35,272 to the FCC in Vermont (excluding mobile and fixed communications). Fees paid from any radio station are not specifically designated to contribute to federal spending on the state from which they came. Therefore, it is difficult, if not impossible, to narrow down the direct influence that the state of Vermont gains from FCC regulation fees. What is more interesting is how insignificant this number is compared to the tremendous use value of the broadcast spectrum. According to a report released by the New America Foundation on December 31, 2001, the use value of the entire broadcast spectrum was $301.78 billion.

This number excludes a recent auction of the “700 megahertz” (MHz) spectrum by the FCC to cellular companies AT&T, Verizon, and Google; to name a few, who bid up the value of the latest chunk of spectrum to $19 billion. While this number is truly stunning, it is important to note that the actual value of the spectrum is driven by physical properties of the radio spectrum that are much broader than the specific transient values created by one or two independent auctions; therefore, these auction values can be misleading in their enormity. As stated in the report, the total use value is the value of spectrum to marginal firms only. Most firms holding spectrum earn more than a marginal return on their holding, and on average are able to earn twice what the marginal firm does on spectrum, setting the producer surplus at half of the “marginal” value noted above ($301.78 x ½ = $150.89). Through this calculation we come up with the number $452.67 billion.

The study continues its analysis by considering the additional value to companies if they could have spectrum to use as they see fit outside of the current misallocations. To accomplish this goal they applied a technique known as a “Delphi Study.” This study was anonymously polled a small panel of leading independent experts in economics and technology use and asked them to answer questions regarding how much money companies would be willing to pay for different pieces of the spectrum above and below 3.5GHz, and how they would use them. They then took this information, re-circulated the answers to the same panel for adjustment, and came up with an industry consensus on how much they were worth. After averaging the numbers they arrived at an additional value for spectrum below 3.5 GHz and $61 billion for spectrum above 3.5 GHz, for a total of $318 billion of potential value from spectrum flexibility (less regulation). Finally, they polled how much additional spectrum it would require to amount to half the total benefit for the spectrum above and below 3.5 GHz and came up with 160 MHz and 300 MHz, respectively. After adding these separate segments to the current use value, the total potential value to license holders for completely flexible licenses is $771 billion.

The three largest contributors to this statistics are broadcast TV, mobile phones, and satellite communications. Broadcast TV is equal to $495 billion, mobile phones $203 billion, and satellite communications $50 billion. To show how much additional value can be generated from flexible licensing, consider the 6 MHz allocated for television broadcast channel 14. If this frequency were put to its best use (most likely cellular telephone) it would create additional revenue of $7.2 billion; an increase of nearly $6.8 billion. Under current regulation, this windfall of profit would find its way directly into the pocket of the license holders. The higher the radio frequency, the less valuable it gets – so much that 1 percent of the spectrum below 3.5 GHz is worth more than 99 percent of the spectrum above 3.5GHz. The lowest spectrum frequencies are the most penetrating, least power-intensive and longest-traveling signals, making them tremendously valuable. This topic is always mentioned when discussing the possibility of implementing flexible-use licensing in the lower spectrums. License holders always argue that there is plenty of spectrum currently using flexible licensing plans, but they fail to mention that these are among the least-effective and least-valuable frequencies.

Given all of this information, it’s clear that the broadcast spectrum is a goldmine of public revenue that has yet to be mined to its full potential. As Senator John McCain once stated, “They used to rob trains in the Old West. Now we rob spectrum.” The tremendous amount of value in broadcast spectrum lends itself to considerable private-interest lobbying that has profound effects over decisions made by the FCC. If positive steps are to be made in the future, disenfranchised decisions must remain in the forefront. The future of spectrum technology is unknown, and without the benefits of free market spectrum allocation the FCC faces risky decisions on the deployment of valuable broadcast spectrum. Among all else, it is clear that the current mismanagement of socialized radio spectrum allocation provides one of the most promising opportunities for commons reform in the future.

**Economic Rent in Spectrum**

Former U.S. Sen. Larry Pressler, who chaired the Senate Commerce Committee, once stated, “The history of U.S. spectrum policy is replete with horror stories of government stifling technological development and new wireless services to the public.” The contemporary experience with public-interest spectrum regulation emphasizes that these decisions characteristically squander rich possibilities for efficient airwave utilization. Proper management of the broadcast spectrum has tremendous potential to serve as a source of public revenue if spectrum is treated as common property. The government manages the “public airwaves” on behalf of the public by allocating spectrum for different uses. After the government decides what types of services are allowed in a given band of frequencies, it may license use of that band to specific entities such as broadcast companies, mobile telephone companies, police departments, and hospitals. While centralized allocation

Table 1. Current Use Values

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Application</th>
<th>Frequencies*</th>
<th>Total MHz*</th>
<th>Value MHz-pop</th>
<th>Total Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mobile Communications</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cellular</td>
<td>824-891.5 MHz</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>$4.18</td>
<td>$59.50B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadband PCS</td>
<td>1850-1975 MHz</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>$4.18</td>
<td>$142.80B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>806-940 MHz</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>$4.18</td>
<td>$17.85B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadcasting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VHF &amp; UHF TV</td>
<td>54-806 MHz</td>
<td>401</td>
<td>$0.233</td>
<td>$26.19B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>0-108 MHz</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>$8.19</td>
<td>$48.16B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satellite TV</td>
<td>12.2-17.5 GHz</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>$0.021</td>
<td>$5.348B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satellite Radio</td>
<td>2320-2345 MHz</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>$0.040</td>
<td>$0.28B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fixed Communications</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LMDS</td>
<td>275-31.3 GHz</td>
<td>1300</td>
<td>$0.0024</td>
<td>$0.87B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39 GHz</td>
<td>38.6-40 GHz</td>
<td>1400</td>
<td>$0.0015</td>
<td>$0.059B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News Gathering</td>
<td>1990-2025 MHz</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>$0.0204</td>
<td>$0.20B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$301.78B</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:  
- a. This indicates the range of frequencies in which this service is located. The entire spectrum range is not necessarily used for the indicated purpose.  
- b. This column shows the total amount of spectrum used for the indicated purpose.

For more information, please visit [Vermont Commons](http://www.vermontcommons.org).
of this nature seems efficient, it ignores the public interest and serves only the privately owned license holders who profit handsomely from their exclusive spectrum rights.

The current mechanism for coordinating spectrum use is equipment regulation, which generally uses power limits to prevent interference. This management structure limits allowable uses based on regulatory judgment. While this system seems sufficient (assuming efficient spectrum allocation), this is not the case. With control centralized this way, society must wait for the state to set resource-access rules band by band; the state thus inhibits the market’s ability to efficiently allocate the resource based on general use guidelines that could otherwise be managed by a commons in the public’s interest. In the past, these allocations have been giveaways to private companies, amounting to billions of dollars of lost revenue for the FCC. An exclusive-use model will be most efficient in many cases; however, government could also consider promoting the important innovation benefits of a spectrum commons by allocating spectrum bands for shared use, similar to land allocated for public parks. Even with a commons spectrum allocation, it is essential to maintain some aspect of private property rights to reasonably evaluate trade-offs under a regime of exclusive ownership rights. This is essential because a market without the evaluative measure of opportunity cost conceals the actual cost of the resource, thus eliminating the necessary inputs for efficient decision-making.

In both cases – common access and limited use – spectrum rules exist to exclude certain activities and facilitate others. Therefore, the essential difference lies in the method of control – that is, which parties get to formulate the rules governing spectrum access. Current government policy aims to minimize signal interference, yet these potential interferences are a byproduct of productive airwave use. Efficient rules maximize the total value of wireless application rather than minimizing the potential for signal disruption. Therefore, if the spectrum allocation were to be left up to a trust/rental program, we can assume that this model would prove very profitable while competitive market forces would reveal a variety of valuable allocation alternatives. Under current management, broadcast television, radio broadcasting, and satellite television are the spectrum owners who collect revenue by renting portions of their broadband to advertisers at the highest price the market will bear. In 2007 the collective advertising revenues for network, local, and syndicated television amounted to $46,556,745,200.

While this number is large and ripe for rent calculation, it cannot all be attributed to the physical use of the spectrum. So when attempting to calculate rent it is important to apply the use-value, which assesses the amount of revenue that is derived from the exclusive ownership of the spectrum and over-the-air use of their licensing (which is often less than the advertising revenue). Also, because not every profit-generating use of the spectrum relies solely on advertising revenues
Spectrum policy is one of the easiest cases to make for common asset reform in the future. The current misallocations are limiting the expansion of efficient spectrum use, while privatization continues to oppose the intended public ownership of the airwaves as dictated by The Communications Act of 1934. The tremendous amount of value in broadcast spectrum lends itself to private-interest lobbying that has profound effects influence over the FCC.

Allowing public auctions of the spectrum to take place is a positive step, but as we have learned from the past it would be tragic to give them permanent and complete property rights. Without the knowledge of the smart-receiver technology that is available, current allocation may seem like an effective approach – but as the technology that utilizes the spectrum will change over time, so should the regulatory regime.

I recently had a conversation with a leading spokesman of the Vermont independence movement. He commented that lawyers, as a group, have been surprisingly reticent to become involved with Vermont independence.

I don’t pretend to be the spokesman for all Vermont lawyers, but I can speak for myself. He’s right. I am reluctant. My hesitance has to do with the effect that secession would have on our legal system. The ability of Vermont lawyers to protect the rights of Vermonters would be seriously compromised. Common law, which is based on precedent, is the fabric of our legal system.

Precedent, in the legal sense, is the history of court decisions that define the rights that we have now. Precedent has been created by adherence to legal process. Rights are not separable from the processes that create and define them.

Sometimes legal process is invoked to protect constitutional rights. But most of the rights litigated in our courts do not have constitutional consequences. We look to the courts to enforce the rights on which we depend to conduct our daily affairs such as our contract rights, our rights to child support, our right to be compensated when another driver negligently collides with us, the right to have our wills properly administered when we die. The just enforcement of our rights depends on due process of law. Our courts are the guardians of due process.

In Vermont we have two court systems: the Vermont state courts, and the United States federal district courts. We depend on these tribunals to resolve issues between private parties as well as disputes with government. The power of the courts is to decide what’s called “jurisdiction.” Secession will limit jurisdiction and due process adversely.

First, independence will eliminate the existence of the United States District Court in Vermont. District Court exercises a type of jurisdiction called “diversity jurisdiction.” The United States Constitution, in Article III, § 2, gives the Congress the power to permit federal courts to hear diversity cases. The provision was included because the Framers of the Constitution were concerned that when a case is filed in one state, and it involves parties from that state and another state, the court in the first state might be biased toward the party from that state. In the federal district court system the court has the power to hear a civil case where the parties are “diverse” in citizenship, be they citizens of different states or non-U.S. citizens. Unlike state judges, federal judges are not appointed or elected by the state in which they are located; nor are federal courts funded by the state in which they are located.

Diversity jurisdiction often arises out of everyday circumstances such as an automobile collision. The facts of a diversity case might look like this: A New York driver, with a Vermont passenger, is involved in an automobile collision with a Kentucky driver while traveling in the state of Vermont. The Vermontor, by invoking diversity jurisdiction, could bring suit in federal district court in Vermont.

However, an independent Vermont will have no federal court. A Vermonter will have to suffer the inconvenience and possible prejudice of using courts outside of Vermont. Then, too, a judgment from a Vermont court will be ineffective outside of Vermont against either the New York driver or the Kentucky driver; because we will no longer be subject to the United States Constitution, the judgments of Vermont courts will not be accorded full faith and credit. The Vermont plaintiff could sue the Kentucky and New York defendants in the Vermont state courts, but it will be without effect because judgments rendered in Vermont will have no legal force nor effect within the United States. Upon secession, Vermont will be considered a foreign nation – and judgments rendered in foreign nations have no force or effect within the United States unless the United States has entered into a treaty recognizing foreign judgments.
The United States has never entered into such a treaty.

The states are prohibited from entering into treaties with other nations – e.g., the Republic of Vermont. (See Article I, Section 10, U.S. Constitution.)

As a member-state of the United States of America we enjoy the benefit of the so-called “full faith and credit clause” of the Constitution, which provides “Full Faith and Credit shall be given in each State to . . . judicial Proceedings of every other State.” The Supreme Court has held this to mean that the merits of a case, as settled by courts of one state, must be recognized by the courts of other states; state courts may not reopen cases that have been conclusively decided by the courts of another state. The citizens of an independent Vermont would not be able to enforce the judgments of Vermont courts in the remaining states.

As Americans we have cherished our individual rights and liberties. Legal process has allowed us, as individuals, to protect those rights. Without the ability to enforce rights, they cease to exist. Perhaps we would be better off without the potpourri of individual liberties that we take for granted, but I don’t think so. Don’t count on lawyers to unconditionally yield individual freedom for the collective benefit of independence from the United States of America. Vermonters’ access to United States district courts is essential to preserving our rights. The full faith and credit clause gives Vermont courts the power to impose enforceable judgments on residents of other states.

As you imagine independence, also imagine living in a world where you will be powerless to enforce legal rights against anyone who isn’t a resident of Vermont. Yes, lawyers are reluctant. You don’t know what you’ve got ‘til it’s gone.

Thanks to statewide legislation encouraging renewables, more and more Vermont businesses like American Flatbread in Mad River Valley are investing in renewable energy. Here, Valley residents celebrate 350.org.

DAVID GARREN
I'm done writing anything in the first person,” I said to Kevin not three weeks ago over beers. “I hear you,” he said. And he did, too; we had spent four years together many years ago, writing columns, lining up our targets for editorials — the latter not written in the first person but with the same intense, personal conviction and pretty much the same stamp as the boisterous “I THINK!”


He nodded, then added, with his familiar, gentle, handsome smile playing across a now-older face, “And who gives a shit, anyway?” We laughed heartily.

Three weeks later, here I am again, first-person-ing it up like a junky or an alcoholic. Here’s what I think. The only trouble is, now there is no certainty, little of that conviction of an earlier time.

For now, the focal subjects — of this publication, at any rate — are secession and economic relocation. Regarding the latter, I share our writers’ sense of urgency about the message. I am less assured about the former — concerned whether to leave the Union would be to leave it to its most nefarious inclinations, with no votes nor words of warning from the Green Mountains.

I edit these pages each time we publish, looking for misuse of the language (“media” used as a singular, disagreement between subject and verb); I e-mail writers when I perceive inconsistencies in their text and ask them to work it out. I cross things out — phrases, sentences, paragraphs sometimes (“Jesus! We GET that, already”) — but probably not as much as I should. I pull the pieces together — mindful, always, that the writers, resolved in their vision of a Second Vermont Republic or at least of a Vermont more self-reliant, are so sure. They are so sure.

Well, I am too, of some things. I am sure that the country of which Vermont constitutes an insignificant fraction is terminally misguided, and in many ways is a menace in the world. We won’t control our emissions, we won’t control our corporations, we won’t control our arm manufacturers and marketers. We won’t control our drug appetite, leading to slaughters in Mexican villages. No, we are not the world’s only menace. The people who smuggled bombs into London’s tube, who committed similar despicable acts in Spain, who blew up embassies in Africa... The Chinese who subjugate Tibet, the rapists of the Congo and Sudan, the Taliban reactionaries who throw acid at unveiled women, the lunatic who bombed the Alfred Murrah Building in Oklahoma City, the cold maniacs who guided passenger planes into tall buildings in 2001, the deranged children who shot their classmates in Columbine...

Yeah, you need a scorecard to track your team in the Terrorist Fantasy League. But don’t forget state terrorism; in that realm, few can match the U.S., swaggering wager of undeclared wars, sneaky secretive manipulator in Iran, Nicaragua, Chile, and they won’t tell us where else. Why would we want to remain part of that?

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Crosslots: To Bail Or Not To Bail, That Is The Question
Will Lindner

I am less assured, concerned whether to leave the Union would be to leave it to its most nefarious inclinations, with no votes nor words of warning from the Green Mountains.
I grew up in Maryland. At the outbreak of the Civil War the Union flooded this 15,000 square-mile state named after history’s most-famous virgin – a state shaped like a gun – with troops to keep it from seceding with Virginia (the second half of the virginal duopoly), which would have isolated the nation’s capital within hostile territory. John Wilkes Booth was my neighbor, merely removed by 100 years.

Maryland in my youth was a state of contradictions, neither southern nor not. I am not old, but I went to a segregated public elementary school. I am not old, but I “recreated” at a segregated amusement park that later became the site of riots when “colored people” asserted their right to play, too. I am not old, but I have lived in Tennessee, where I rode in the back seat of a U.S. government-services sedan listening to the men in the front seat griping, while they negotiated the streets of Nashville, that there were “too many niggers and not enough know-how” in their newly integrated workforce. This is not ancient history.

I don’t trust this country. I don’t trust that the Tea Party “patriots,” consumed by selfishness and noisy self-righteousness, “have always hated big government” but just didn’t get around to squawking about it until a black man got elected president. I don’t trust a country that simultaneously protests taxes and fetishizes a bloated, mechanized, digitalized, globalized military machine, while dithering about unemployment benefits and cutting human services for American citizens who are somehow less than.

But do I want to leave it?

Good question. For certitude, I direct you to virtually every other page in this publication. There is none here. To the degree I don’t want to depart the 50-star vale, it is not out of allegiance to a country where people like Sarah Palin and Sharron Angle are considered valid candidates for public office, a polity now tilting so far toward craziness that you can begin to smell the fascism in the kitchen. I guess it’s true. All we can do is tend our little patch of the Green Mountains and try to create the society we envision – no mean feat, though, considering the Palinesque Vermonters among us, whose votes loom as large as anyone’s.

Thank goodness for the visionaries, the prophets and futurists at Vermont Commons whose eyes already are focused on a lovely purple sunset above the low and smooth-worn Green Mountains. If the time should come when we do leave the “Empire,” perhaps in their wisdom they can impart some modicum of equanimity to doubters like me about the injustices we leave behind for others to solve.

I me mine, I me mine. I sure hope Kevin doesn’t see this.

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The oil and propane used to heat Vermont buildings represents a key vulnerability to the triple challenges that Transition Towns address: peak oil, climate change, and economic collapse. More than half of Vermont buildings heat with oil. The people in those buildings are at risk of oil price spikes or, at the end of a long supply chain, even supply disruptions. And at current prices, the oil purchases send around $400 billion out of state each year; that’s a lot of jobs that could be created if the money was kept here.

In Vermont, a state that is 80-percent forested, the natural relocalizing solution is to use wood heat. The amount of wood in the state’s forests is increasing faster than it’s harvested, and supply chains are short. Communities are now showing that there are more creative and efficient ways to heat with wood than putting a wood stove in every home.

To be sure, there’s a lot to say for modern wood stoves. They’re efficient, their particulate emissions are significantly less than their forbears’, and what can beat the feeling of sitting or standing next to a wood stove when you’ve just come inside with cold fingers and toes? In a superinsulated home designed for solar gain, one-to-two cords of wood per season can provide all the heat and even some of the hot water.

But how about having the convenience of thermostatically controlled heat, with all the benefits of wood as a fuel but no fuel to lug into or ash to take out of each building? District heating, on a small or large scale, provides an answer.

Wood-fired district heating plants burn cleaner than even the new wood stoves, and larger systems can be set up to generate electricity with the heat.

Wood-fired district heating plants are already in use in Vermont. The state heats many state buildings in Montpelier from a single facility, with boilers that use both oil and woodchips. (The city and state are investigating how to convert the facility to one fired 90 percent by woodchips, with expanded capacity to add both municipal buildings and many commercial buildings and residences.) Middlebury College has just completed a wood-fired district heating plant.

At the other end of the scale, White Pines cohousing community in East Montpelier uses district heating for six families (in three duplexes) and a workshop. The buildings are so efficient and designed to capture solar power that a single residential pellet stove powers the whole system. In the middle of the scale is a new complex of dorms at Dartmouth, where a pellet-fired system heats 25-30 new dorm buildings containing a total of 104 units, according to Charles Agnew at Biomass Commodities, a Massachusetts-based company that did the work.

Wood-fired district heating plants burn cleaner than even the new wood stoves, and larger systems can be set up to generate electricity with the heat, also, capturing even more of the energy in the fuel. Woodchips cost a fraction of the price of oil for the equivalent amount of heat, and while they go up when oil prices go up, the spike in wood prices is not as dramatic as the oil price spike.

A key theme of transition towns is that individuals are inadequate to the task of responding to peak oil, climate change, and economic collapse, and that national governments don’t have the resources, either. Our best bet is local communities, working together. In a climate where freezing in the dark is a real possibility, district heating is a community-level solution that could warm many of us.

There’s real uncertainty in the Transition community about how much time we have before the oil-powered economy is severely disrupted. Resilience author Sharon Astyk recently argued that there may not be enough time to weatherize our existing buildings and outfit them with local, renewable heat sources. She suggested that we concentrate our resources on community buildings, so we’d all have somewhere to go that is warm and functional. In Vermont, 20 percent of children already attend a school heated with wood chips. Converting the rest of the schools would be good insurance for taxpayers against oil price increases, and for everyone against suddenly finding the oil or propane truck has suspended deliveries.
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standing by Perry in the eye of the storm. “A free society means you can dissolve.” Conceding that the Civil War, er, complicated matters somewhat, Paul opined that had secession remained a vital principle in American life, “the federal government would have been restrained” throughout our history, as the threat of states breaking away would have acted as a brake on the runaway national juggernaut.3

If secession today has a vaguely naughty, even disreputable sound, owing to that war which Gore Vidal called “the great single tragic event that continues to give resonance to our republic,” that only means we need to throw away our social studies textbooks and relearn, or learn for the first time, history as it is not dictated by the winners to the stenographers.4

Talk of breaking up our increasingly fractious and unhappy union predated the presidency of Barack Obama. In fact, it gained voice largely due to the man who made possible the Ovalization of Mr. Obama: George W. Bush. In the wake of the egregious Bush reelection in 2004, frustrated liberals talked secession back to within hailing distance of the margins of national debate – a place it had not occupied since 1861. With their praise of self-rule and the devolution of power, they sounded not unlike many conservatives had in the days before Bush & Cheney & Limbaugh welded the American Right to the American Empire. While certain proponents of the renascent secessionism were motivated by spite or pixilated by whimsy or driven by the simplenminded belief that these United States can be divided into blue and red – as though our beautiful land can be painted in only two hues! – others argued with cogency and passion for a disunionist position that bordered on the, well, seditious.

Emphasizing both culture (“Now that slavery is taken care of, I’m for letting the South form its own nation,” said Democratic operative Bob Beckel) and economics (Democratic pundit Lawrence O’Donnell noted that “ninety percent of the red states are welfare clients of the federal government”), writing in forums of neoliberalism (Slate) and venerable liberalism (The Nation), liberals helped to disinter a body of thought that had been buried at Appomattox. And – surprise! – the corpse has legs.5

Secession is the next radical idea poised to enter mainstream discourse, or at least the realm of the conceivable. You can’t bloat a modest republic into a crapulent empire without sparking one hell of a centrifugal reaction. 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 all the frightful signposts on our road to nowhere. The liberals who considered secession while tossing and turning in the fever dreams of the Bush nightmare may back off, for the nonce, mollified by the honeyed cadences of the savior Obama. But he is no less a servitor of Wall Street and the American Empire than are the Republicans, and when President Obama dispatches troops to Georgia (the land of Joseph Stalin, not Ray Charles) or Somalia or bombs Iran, in fulfillment of John McCain’s campaign jingle, they may be jolted once more into a radical and clear-eyed wakefulness.

Some of the contemporary secessionists are puckish and playful; others are dead serious. Some seek to separate from the main body of a state and add a fifty-first star to the American flag, while others wish to leave the United States altogether. Some proposals are so sensible (the division of California into two or three states) that in a just world they would be inevitable. Others are so radical (the independent republic of Vermont) as to seem risibly implausible – until you meet the activists and theoreticians preparing these new declarations of independence.

For these movements are, in the main, hopeful and creative (if utopian) responses to the Current Mess engulfing our land. They are the political antidote to the disease of giantism. We are a nation born in secession, after all, and of rebel lion against faraway rulers. Ruptures, crackups, and the splintering of overlarge states into polities of more-manageable size, closer to the human scale, are as American as runaway slaves and tax protesters. •

1 As quoted in Naylor, 47.
2 As quoted in Naylor, 47.
3 As quoted in Naylor, 97.
4 As quoted in Kaufman, 227.
5 Kaufman, xxx.
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There’s much talk these days, particularly by the Tea Party types, about getting back to the “real” Constitution, forcing the Obama government to honor the “original intent” of the Founding Fathers, and “understanding the Constitution through the eyes of its creators,” as one contributor to the Tenth Amendment Center recently put it. That center, in fact, is dedicated to, and attracting a growing following for, a rigid interpretation of that amendment reserving to the states the powers not expressly given to the federal government.

And along with it in the last few years has grown up a Constitution Party that has the idea that the nation’s problems can be solved by “a renewed allegiance” to the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution and hence a return to “limited government.” The problem with current officials of both parties, as the CP sees it, is that they “ignore their oaths to uphold the Constitution” – that is to say, the Constitution as originally written and used in the 18th century.

This would be a far different country, of course, if it paid an allegiance to the document of 1787 that the renegade Congress had come up with, in secret, that summer in Philadelphia, even along with its first 10 amendments. But what all the critics who believe that going back to the original Constitution would forestall the kinds of forces that have led to the present bloated, overstretched, intrusive, and unwieldy government do not realize is that this is what it almost inevitably had to lead to.

Let’s wake up these “real Constitution” die-hards and the ardent “Tenthers” and tell them that it’s a waste of time to try to resurrect that document in order to save the nation – because the growth of government and the centralization of power is inherent in its original provisions, as the anti-Federalists were trying to say from the very beginning of the ratification process. Only when we get people today off this understandable but ill-fated track can we begin to open their eyes to the reality of our present peril: we have a big overgrown government because that’s what the Founding Fathers founded, and we won’t escape from it until we take the idea of secession as seriously as it must be taken.

Let’s look at some of the dangerous elements of the “real” Constitution.

It starts off with a phrase that sounded alarm bells right away for those who had experienced the powers of the individual states as sovereign states under the Articles of Confederation, and saw that it was not to the states but to “we the people” that power would be given.

“What right had they to say, ‘We the people’ cried Patrick Henry to the Virginia ratification convention, “instead of, ‘We the states?’” He saw that the phrase gave power to an amorphous “people” whom the new government could define and use as it chose, bypassing and undercutting the states. If “the people” spoke through the Congress, it could willy-nilly ignore the individual states.

Which, indeed, is what happened, and Congress was cheerfully ratified in doing so by another centralizing branch of government, the Supreme Court. But the idea was never more egregiously used than when Lincoln denied that the states had any particular power – indeed, denied that they were sovereign entities at all – and argued that all power rests with the people, who had created a United States and wanted it united. “Government of the people,” in other words, means that Washington can do whatever it damn pleases in their name.

The anti-Federalists had warned of exactly that 70 years before. The framers of the Constitution, said Luther Martin, a delegate to the convention from Maryland, were crypto-monarchists whose “wish it was to abolish and annihilate all State governments, and to bring forward one general government . . . of a monarchical nature, under certain restrictions and limitations.” That was said in November 1787. Don’t say you weren’t warned.

But let’s go on with the faults of the centralizers’ Constitution. There is in Article I a bold statement that “Congress shall have the power to” – and there continued on page 32
Dispersions, continued from page 31
follow some specifics about taxes and debts, then concluding “provide for the . . . general welfare of the United States.” Agree to that and you’ve agreed it can do anything it likes without check or rein, for what measure could not be thought to be enhancing the “general welfare”? James Madison, who had a hand in federal enlargement elsewhere in the document, saw the danger here: “If Congress can employ money indefinitely to the general welfare, and are the sole and supreme judges of the general welfare, they may take the care of . . . everything, from the highest object of state legislation down to the most minute object of police.” That is not what they had fought a war against the British monarchy for.

Not more than a few phrases away is the famous “commerce clause,” by which a Supreme Court, ever-willing to enhance the powers of the Washington establishment, managed almost from the beginning to enhance Congressional control over what the states would be allowed to do. Congress shall have the power, it reads, “to regulate commerce with foreign nations, and among the several states.” That would seem to mean that Congress could establish terms by which states could trade with each other, so that none would establish tariffs against any other – “a negative and preventive provision against injustice among the States themselves,” as Madison saw it, “rather than as a power to be used for the positive purposes of the General Government.”

But positive is what the clause became. The Supreme Court decided that practically anything that went on commercially within one state would have some kind of effect on all the others, in some way or other, and so government can regulate it. As early as 1828 the court held that the government could regulate trade on the Hudson River for its entire length because some of it ran along New Jersey, and the monopoly New York State had given to Robert Fulton to run his steamboat was to be null and void because it affected New Jerseyans. Its reading of the clause became ever more expansive as time went on, and by the New Deal it gave the government carte blanche to interfere in state business down to the level of a janitor’s salary and a farmer’s wheat crop.

“Government of the people” (and not “of the states”) means that Washington can do whatever it damn pleases in their name.

And as if that wasn’t a sufficient interference in state business, the Founding Fathers wound up their Constitution with a clause that ringingly asserted that what they had just enumerated as the powers of the government – and any laws that they should subsequently pass “in pursuance thereof” – “shall be the supreme law of the land” and judges in the states better take that to heart. This “supremacy clause” was hotly debated at the time because it, like the other sections above, could be interpreted in such a broad way that the states would be powerless to act on matters of serious concern.

Thus it was that when there finally came a slew of amendments that the people of the states demanded as checks on federal power, one of the most important was the Tenth, asserting that Washington had only the specific powers enumerated in the Constitution and the states had jurisdiction in all else.

Which brings up the final deficiency in that Constitution: that Tenth Amendment, itself. It seems clear that a great many serious people felt that when it said “the powers not delegated to the U.S. . . . are reserved to the states . . . or to the people,” this guaranteed a considerable sovereignty for the states. But the centralists agreed to it (and put it at the end of the Bill of Rights) because they knew that it was so unspecific, so merely rhetorical, that it was capable of any interpretation, and that a Supreme Court capable of giving itself judicial review over Congress (not enumerated in the Constitution) would be capable of finding that the powers delegated to the U.S. were pretty vast and those given to the states were few and limited in scope.

As it so happened.

The Tenthers are fighting valiantly to reverse the 220 years in which that last item in the Bill of Rights has been emasculated and rendered effectively irrelevant, and they may even be gaining some attention, particularly in the states’ growing resistance to Obamacare. But it seems most unlikely that, with the other centralizing tools at their command, the federal courts will give it much consideration.

When they finally see their beloved amendment in shreds, maybe the Tenthers and other Constitutional-Firsters will begin to see that the U.S. Constitution – by the centralists, of the nationalists, and for the Hamiltonians – is not a document that will lead them to liberty and sovereignty. The only method for that, let us hope they finally realize, is secession. •