Burlington Kisses Lockheed?  
Just Say No  

Jonathan Leavitt


“These are conservative tactics for a radical strategy. And in that spirit we signed the Letter of Cooperation, and we would sign others.”  
Burlington Mayor Bob Kiss

Burlington Mayor Bob Kiss stood unmoved even as Burlington’s city council passed 10-to-4 a resolution on Monday, February 7, calling for community standards and public input in hopes of satiating the largest of wave of dissent to fill the stately walls of City Hall in many years. Estimated at approximately 100 people, the feisty crowd was a true cross-section of the Queen City: heads of sustainability corporations and green engineers, nuns and drag queens, business owners and bohemians, community organizers and environmental grad students, even moms and their teenaged daughters.

In late December, when it leaked in Seven Days, a local alternative weekly, that Mayor Kiss had inked a Letter of Cooperation between liberal Mecca Burlington and the world’s largest war profiteer to “test drive” some of Lockheed Martin’s “market-driven” climate-change “technologies,” all hell broke loose inside the Burlington left. Charges of corporate greenwashing and hypocrisy lit up Facebook pages and coffee shop conversations. Such charges land fresh like the daily newspaper at the doorstep of most mayors of American cities. Kiss, however, is a former conscientious objector, and a member of Vermont’s Progressive Party, the most successful third party in the U.S., which touts a platform totally at odds with war profiteers like Lockheed. It’s the party that claims Bernie Sanders, lone socialist U.S. senator,

Why should Vermonters care about food sovereignty? Don’t we do what we wanna – trade seeds, plant gardens, drink raw milk, butcher our farm animals and wild-caught game? We all have to eat – but that’s where the federal government is now stepping in. Vermonters do is not good enough; it’s not part of a system.

We care about the quality of the food that we eat, and it breaks our hearts when we cannot afford to do the best for our children. The issue of food breaks all barriers between right, left and independent.

The U.S. Senate has just passed the “Food Safety” bill (S. 510; or H.R. 2755), giving the FDA total control over Vermont’s food production and supply. This follows an enormous pressure by Big Ag over the past year to co-opt farmers orga-
Editorial

The Knave and his Interlocutor Talk about Vermont’s Future

[Note to the reader: The courts of feudal and later kingdoms had their chancellors and jesters to advise or entertain their imperial monarchs, to dispense opinions wise and foolish as to the lay of the land. Here we reinvent an honored convention, omitting the monarch, who might be incensed by the opinions of the lowly Jack of Knaves or even by those of the graver Interlocutor.]

Tell me Knave, what are your expectations — if any — for Vermont this year?

Interesting times, interesting enough that a ringside seat will be worth the price.

Blue Vermont is paradoxically going to command the attention of Red, Tea Party America. Vermont’s going to be in the front of the newly awakened States Rights movement, at least for the next two years.

Really? How so?

Shumlin is going to stake the first term of his governorship on two initiatives of national significance, as he asserted publicly on Amy Goodman on January 21: Vermont will craft a single-payer statewide health care system that leaves no Vermonter behind, and the state will do what no other state government has done before: close a nuclear power plant that has lived out the full term of its designed lifespan of 40 years. Vermont Yankee will be decommissioned in 2012. At last according to Governor Shumlin. Public record.

Hmm. What makes you think America will care if Vermont goes single payer? Or shuts down its old nuke? I mean, all the other old New England “Yankee” plants have already been closed for more than a decade?

As you know, Interlocutor, the insurance industry refused to let its representatives – I mean, our senators and House members – consider a single-payer option during their “debates” over the national health care bill. Vermont is emerging to do what Obama and others claim individual states should be able to do – test options and find out if indeed they are workable. Thus the nationally off-limits “socialist” option of single payer may come into being here, and if it does, and then succeeds, it will prove a permanent big thorn in the ideological flank of the national health care industry.

Of course, 40 percent of America’s health care system is already socialized: Medicare, Medicaid, and the VA. The insurance industry can only prey on 60 percent. True enough, but you’re not asking for reason, are you? No, I thought not. As for Vermont Yankee, which generates more of this state’s electricity than any other nuclear plant or plants do in their states, Vermont uniquely among all 50 states has the power – is in this instance sovereign – to shut the plant down, the NRC be damned! And the NRC isn’t a mouse. It will roar if Vermont does what Shumlin insists it’s going to do. And it may find a way to bite us in the ass. Who knows?

Knave, just how do you suppose, assuming Lord Obama permits an exemption from his new health care system or that the NRC doesn’t counterattack… How do you suppose that Vermont, already in hock up to its earlobes, is going to pay for its own proud little health care system? Or, come 2012, that it will supply whatever shortfall in its electricity requirements results when Vermont Yankee shuts down forever?

Silence.

Well?

Continue to read Vermont Commons, Interlocutor. We don’t have the space here to explore the answers to your questions. They will be answered.

Hmm. You’re indeed a knave… So, that’s it?

No, there’s more, a good deal more. As you know the national big-biz food industry has written a

Contributors

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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.

Juliet Buck is an activist, wannabe homesteader, wife, and mother of two, who is making other plans while watching it all go to hell from South Burlington. She blogs under the moniker Radical SAHM.

Lauren-Glenn Davitian is an activist and organizer specializing in issues related to community-based media. She is executive director of CCTV Center for Media & Democracy, and lives in Burlington. davitian@cctv.org

Carl Etnier is director of Peak Oil Awareness in Montpelier. He hosts two radio shows and blogs on the subjects of peak oil and relocating.

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


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.

Ben Haulenbeek is a Vermont native who divides his time as a photographer between Vermont and New York City.

Michael Hayes is a freelance photographer and new-media geek who resides in Burlington.

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

Jasmine Lamb is a teacher and coach. She writes the blog, All is Listening: Loving Your Imperfect Life, at www.allislistening.com.

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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.

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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Letters to the Editor

PEAK OIL, SO WHAT?

Editor, Vermont Commons:

I like much of what I read in Vermont Commons, but I don’t like needless fear mongering. That is how I see it with the numerous articles about peak oil.

Historically, there have been many resource crises. In the 19th century Englishmen heated their houses with firewood. Then the last big trees were cut and the wood ran out abruptly. They had to switch to coal. In the 20th century coal was deemed too dirty and the English had to switch again. Similarly, changes in climate and water supply have caused innumerable civilizations to ascend and decline. On the whole, financial crises and social upheaval have been beneficial. Without crises mankind might still be struggling to advance beyond the Stone Age.

What makes the peak oil crisis different? Fortunes will be lost but others will be built. Social disruption may occur. Isn’t that desirable? As oil runs out prices will rise, thus providing incentives for people to change. That’s entirely normal and no cause for despair or handwringing. On the contrary, we need the stimulus. Further, in my humble opinion, peak oil is only the third-biggest crisis currently in progress.

First is globalization, elimination of poverty, and [over] population. Consider Mr. Gupta in India, Mr. Wu in China, Mr. Smith in the USA, and Mr. Schmidt in Germany. If all are equally educated and productive, then they all deserve equal shares of the pie of wealth. Three billion people in Asia are poised to become as affluent as we in the West. They’ll demand a bigger share of the pie and the only place for it to come from is the Westerners’ share. Decreasing standards of living are in the cards for us Westerners, and that’s a bitter pill to swallow. Worse, to build cars, houses, highways and more for the three billion nouveaux riches will mean a temporary increase in demand for world resources by a factor of 11. Not 11 percent, but 1,100 percent. Those resources don’t exist. That will force us to realize that the globe can only sustainably support one billion people. We’re presently on course for nine billion.

What will we do? That’s a colossal crisis.
In January, David Cobb of MoveToAmend.org toured Vermont to educate community leaders and Vermont legislators about why corporations should not have the same inalienable rights as humans. MoveToAmend.org’s mission is to push for an amendment to the U.S. Constitution to make it clear that corporations are not humans and should not have human rights.

Cobb’s trip was sponsored by the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, and a grant from Ben & Jerry’s. Two of the people who organized his visit – progressive activists Cheryl Diersch and Robin Lloyd – are also on this publication’s editorial board (Vermont Commons: Voices of Independence, makes no journalistic claim to objectivity on this or any other issue).

The educational meetings during Cobb’s visit were promoted by leaders from several Vermont organizations, including Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility, Rural Vermont, Vermont Commons, the Big Picture Theatre, the Bethany Church, Transition Town Montpelier, and the League of Women Voters. His visit coincided with the introduction of a resolution in the Vermont Senate, by Chittenden County State Sen. Virginia Lyons. The resolution, the first of its kind in the U.S. on this issue, proposes “an amendment to the United States Constitution . . . which provides that corporations are not persons under the laws of the United States.”

Parts of this interview were conducted at the Vermont Statehouse after an informational presentation that Cobb gave to Vermont legislators, which followed a press conference by Sen. Lyons. The resolution, when introduced on Tuesday, January 18, had already been signed by 12 of Vermont’s 30 state senators and has as a co-sponsor the chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, Sen. Richard Sears. Lyons is optimistic that the resolution will pass.

David Cobb was born in Houston, Texas, and grew up in poverty in a shrimping village on the Gulf of Mexico. A 1993 graduate of Houston Law School, Cobb ran for Texas Attorney General in 2002, pledging to use the office to revoke the charters of corporations that break the law. As the Green Party nominee for president in 2004, Cobb’s campaign initiated and funded the vote recount in Ohio that uncovered fraud in that presidential election. He now lives in Humboldt, California. Motivated in part by his childhood experience, Cobb serves with local and national organizations that promote social, environmental, and economic justice.

Tell me your impressions of Vermont and our context here. What’re your impressions after spending a few days here?

David Cobb: Well at the risk of sounding sycophantic, I gotta tell you I am more than impressed by Vermont and the engaged citizenry of this state. I have been traveling the country for the last several years trying to help spark a movement to make the promise of democracy a reality. Because for us, corporate personhood or corporate constitutional rights is at the very core of the question: who rules in this country? Because we know that unelected and unaccountable corporate CEOs are not merely exercising power, they are ruling us. As surely as masters once ruled their slaves or kings once ruled their subjects, these unelected and unaccountable corporate CEOs have hijacked our government; they’ve hijacked our media institutions; they’ve hijacked our healthcare institutions; they are making the decisions about what food we are allowed to eat and what kind of health care we get. We’ve lost control of our country.

And what I’ve found as I traveled Vermont is that engaged citizens not only know that this is a big problem, but they are actually fighting back. Many Vermonter are willing to fight back as part of a larger movement to amend the U.S. Constitution. But equally exciting is the fact that Vermonter are also creating alternatives to the current corporate model. This state is replete with examples of cooperatives, sustainable agriculture, lifestyle choices, sustainable building and energy practices, and ordinary citizens working together with their neighbors to actually get their needs met outside of the corporate system. But you know, it’s not an either/or, it’s a both/and. Yes we need to create alternatives, and we also need to amend the U.S. Constitution. So my impressions of Vermont: ya’ll are getting things done here.

I’d like to clarify a point for people who maybe don’t understand what Citizens United is about, or who might be unclear what corporate personhood means. Is the move to amend about campaign finance, or a company’s ability to speak to their positions and lobby, etc? The amendment question seems to be very specific about whether inalienable constitutional rights that belong to humans should also apply to corporate entities that are not actually humans.

D.C.: The fundamental thing we’re talking about is this: the U.S. Constitution makes it clear that no part of the government can infringe upon the individual civil liberties of any of its citizens. And as a civil libertarian support that principle and fight like hell anytime there are local, state, or federal laws that actually do infringe upon the rights on the people. There are many examples where that has happened. I believe that the USA PATRIOT Act for example is unconstitutional, on itsface. I certainly know for a fact that the Jim Crow segregation laws that were passed at the state level were unconstitutional because they violated the rights of African-American citizens.

The point is this: I am not anti-corporation; I believe corporations should exist and should be allowed to engage in commerce. But I do not believe that corporations can ever legitimately walk into court and claim that they have some sort of inherent inalienable constitutional rights that have been violated by a local, state, or federal action. Because these artificial entities don’t have inherent rights, only people do. Any rights that a corporation has must come from the democratic process. Corporations have legal rights, yes, but those are not inalienable inherent rights of natural law as recognized by the Constitution.

If corporations continue to have constitutional human rights, including the equal-protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, does this mean that a town or state cannot make laws that regulate transnational companies, unless the laws also regulate the small local companies the same way?

D.C.: No. I encourage local communities to exercise their inherent right to sovereignty and to pass those laws that are needed to protect themselves. Although corporate lawyers may argue that such
efforts violate a corporation’s alleged constitutional rights, it is our position that the doctrine which purports to grant corporate “rights” is illegitimate.

If Vermont hits the wall on this issue and no amendment vote is called for by Congress, what other recourse does the state have? Is this not also a states’ rights question?

D.C.: Vermont can do what they did during the days of slavery, which is to refuse to comply with illegitimate federal courts interference. Remember, the courts can only overturn local, state or federal laws if such a law violates the inalienable human rights of a person. And a corporation is not a person.

Do you think that overturning corporate citizenship would make it easier for states to re-localize their economies to create better jobs, because local governments would have the ability to regulate local commerce in ways that prioritized local business and local production?

D.C.: Absolutely! And to be explicit, it is our position at Move To Amend that Vermont – as well as your local communities – already have the right to regulate commerce. Our constitutional amendment would merely recognize that right, which the Supreme Court has illegitimately claimed to have taken away.

Some of the people I’ve talked to about this, particularly those who fall on the right side of the political spectrum, see the move to amend as an assault on rights of association where groups of people come together as an association or corporation to speak their mind. It’s an important distinction to make that overturning corporate citizenship does not necessarily mean that corporations will lose any free-speech rights. Overturning corporate citizenship would only mean that corporate rights are not inalienable, meaning that local, state and federal laws and the democratic process would determine the rules which corporations must follow.

D.C.: Correct, and I think it’s worth pointing out that there are talking points that say any effort on the part of the people to fight back against corporate abuses must be anti-business by definition. And I simply disagree with that. That framework is incorrect. I will tell you this. We have Tea Party adherents participating with us at MoveToAmend.org. We have Libertarians participating with us. The issue of corporations claiming constitutional rights cuts across ideology and party labels. Principled progressives and principled conservatives and independents all can agree on the idea that We the People are sovereign and that corporations are merely business entities; that corporations are useful entities to use capital and labor to get things done. And we support that. But corporations should never be able to claim constitutional rights.

You mentioned that you’re seeing grassroots support from people across the political spectrum. But I’ve also heard you talk about the corporate-sponsored corruption that rules both main political parties at the national level. How does the grassroots dialogue transcend right/left divisions, given that the leaders of the mainstream right/left dialogue are controlled by corporate interests?

D.C.: We are encouraging people to only support candidates who will take an unambiguous stand opposing the doctrine of corporate constitutional rights and who will support a constitutional amendment to that effect. We also encourage people to run for office themselves. And that means in the corporate-controlled parties and also as independents and members/supporters of alternative political parties. The success of the Progressive Party in Vermont is an example of the strength of grassroots organizing.

What do you think of the fact that the main organizers and sponsors of your trip to Vermont included groups focused on peace and justice, agriculture, sustainability, peak oil and transition, socially responsible business, Vermont political independence (a.k.a. secession), along with Ben and Jerry’s?

D.C.: Folks engaged in efforts for peace, justice, sustainability, and socially responsible commerce understand very well that corporate constitutional rights are a barrier to creating the world we want and deserve. We are proud that they are collaborating with us on this fundamental question, which is simple: Who Rules? Is it “We the People” or transnational corporations?

If Vermont passes this resolution, what else would have to happen to actually get a popular vote to amend the Constitution?

D.C.: The same things that happened during every great movement in this country, from abolitionists to women’s suffrage to trade unions to civil rights – a broad and deep grassroots movement of people demanding systemic change. And that is beginning to happen across the country!

What should people who support the move to amend do if they want to help?

D.C.: First, sign the petition at www.MoveToAmend.org and ask your friends and family to do so as well. Second, write a letter to the editor sharing your position with other community members. Third, call in to talk radio. This is an effective way to get the word out. Fourth, pass a resolution supporting a constitutional amendment (tips and examples are on our website). This can be done by a political party, your church, synagogue, or mosque, and local civic groups.

The bottom line is, we need to make it a viable political issue. During election season, go to candidate forums and ask “Do you support the opinion that corporations are persons and therefore have the rights of free speech under the First Amendment?” After the election, visit with your elected official and let your voice be heard. And be prepared to run for office yourself!

Well, thank you for coming to Vermont and helping us set this into motion. I think it’ll be interesting to see where this goes and how quickly.

D.C.: Well, how quickly is the question. I’ve had the privilege of reading the Vermont Commons publication and one thing that ya’ll seem to be aware of is that the current transnational corporate empire is failing. And we will be wise if we both dismantle this empire as it comes crumbling down and build up the alternative institutions to take its place at the same time. It’s not either/or, it’s both/and. Peace.
Editorial, continued from page 2

You mean, Knave, the federal government is about to enter the situation posed by our greatest poet: “No memory of having starred! Alones for later disregard,/ Or keeps the end from being hard./ Better go down dignified/ With boughten friendship at your side/ Than none at all. Provide! Provide!”

How well you recite Frost, Interlocutor! Yes, yes. That sums it up. The friendship of Wall Street and the giant jobs-outsourcing, pay-no-taxes corpora-
tions will be the federal government’s only solace, its only friend, if it cannot provide for the states, the towns, and the small businesses that once made this country full of promise. And it's on record saying it won't provide. And even if it caves, and does provide with “QE” 3, 4, and 5, following the earlier “quantitative easing” so delightful to Wall Street, the fires of inflation are sooner or later going to burn down the House the Dollar Built. And I don’t mean the little house on the prairie. Vermont stands atop the front wave of an exodus, the rising winds of local sovereignty at its back.

You make it sound too easy, your romantic vision of power falling, stumbling over its own feet, Knave. Perhaps. Of course there is a reaction contra going on, too. Down in D.C., Sanders is trying to “provide” by anchoring Vermont deeper inside the nation’s fabulously bloated, socialized military/industrial/Congressional complex. He wants a subsidiary of Sandia National Laboratories, the we-design-better-nuclear-weapons-for-you company, to come on up north and provide Vermonters “jobs.” Yah.

Yes, but the wolf that Bernie’s leading into Vermont on a leash goes baa-baa. It bleats like a wee lamb that it will show Vermonters how to do smart energy systems. This is change fools can “believe” in, Knave.

It’s how the MICC gets into the little “green” state, Interlocutor, as we both know. The federal government contracts with Lockheed Martin to manage Sandia and its complex of 20-odd death-star labs, while politicians scatter these toxic “gifts” across the land. Curiously the hapless “progressive” mayor of Burlington is also making sweet with that same corporate entity, the Sandia-Labs managing Lockheed, the world’s largest and most criminal defense contractor. Odd timing, no?

It is odd. But odder things happen. All the time. The builder of the F-35 boondoggle jet and licentious drone-kill centers is dancing with Mr. Kiss, for the unspecified “benefit” of Burlington’s progressive citizens. Read Jonathan Leavitt’s front-page story if you don’t believe me.

Oh, I believe you all right. Though Bernie’s stealth is almost never noticed — such are the qualities of the silver his tongue possesses — Vermonters are actively resisting Mayor Kiss’s back-stage dance with that obese eater of our tax larder, that unbridled rat-monger of death. Savvy Vermonters are not in the mood to be hoodwinked by the Big Business socialists down in D.C. Or by their pals in Montpelier. This is their common bond with the red states, so-called.

So… That’s it? For now, Interlocutor, yes. It’s enough.

For now it just might be enough, Knave. I’ll take a ringside seat.

Ian Baldwin
Publisher Emeritus
Localvore Living: Putting the CSA Model to the Test  Robin McDermott

CSAs have become commonplace in Vermont. It is cool to say that you belong to one and even cooler if you belong to two or more. And, for the most part, farmers in Vermont have done a good job holding up their end of the bargain with Community Supported Agriculture models. So it is easy to forget the concept behind CSAs.

Most farms advertise CSAs as “buying into the farm,” which is in essence what their shareholders are doing. Just like a Fortune 500 stock that goes up and down based on how well the business is doing (at least that’s the way that it worked in the good old days), the value of a CSA share, or what the members take home from the farm on a weekly basis, depends on how well the farm is doing. For example, a couple of summers ago when early blight took out most of the tomato plants in the state, CSA members shared in that loss with the farmers; there were no tomatoes in most CSA baskets that year. Some CSAs make up for shortages by providing other veggies that are performing better on their farm (for example, kale, which thrived that year), but with most CSAs there isn’t a contractual obligation on the farmers’ part to provide any specific food or amount of food. Trust and reputation are usually the only guides that customers have in making a decision to invest in a CSA.

But even with small hiccups like the tomato-less summer, Vermont CSA farmers have been good at keeping up their half of the bargain. In fact, when a farm has a bumper crop of a particular vegetable, the shareholders will come away with extra veggies that week; that is how CSAs are supposed to work. Yet it’s easy, as CSA shareholders, to forget that the periodic bounty that we look forward to picking up on a set schedule is not guaranteed.

It was easy, that is, until January 12, when a fire destroyed the barn at Pete’s Greens. In addition to losing wash house equipment, several tractors, numerous pieces of priceless vintage farm equipment and the barn itself, which is the “heart” of farm’s operation, all of the storage vegetables and frozen meats that were allocated to fill CSA shares throughout the rest of the winter went up in smoke. This was a far more serious a loss to CSA members than getting shorted on a couple of tomatoes. Before the fire department had squelched the last burning ember, members of the Pete’s Greens Good Eats CSA received e-mail notification that their CSA pickup that day would be the last for a couple of months; there simply wasn’t any food available to fill the weekly CSA orders.

But the e-mail also offered all of the shareholders a refund for the portion of the CSA that would not be filled in the coming weeks. Traditional financial investments simply don’t work like this. Lehman Brothers stockholders had no such recourse when their stock lost its full value on September 15, 2008, after the company declared bankruptcy. My mother, who was heavily invested in General Motors bonds, didn’t receive a letter from GM offering her a refund when a good chunk of her life savings became worthless as the company slithered into bankruptcy.

The unfortunate situation at Pete’s Greens highlights the real value in CSAs and how the concept behind them is doing (at least that’s the way that it worked in the good old days), the value of a CSA share, or what the members take home from the farm on a weekly basis, depends on how well the farm is doing. For example, a couple of summers ago when early blight took out most of the tomato plants in the state, CSA members shared in that loss with the farmers; there were no tomatoes in most CSA baskets that year. Some CSAs make up for shortages by providing other veggies that are performing better on their farm (for example, kale, which thrived that year), but with most CSAs there isn’t a contractual obligation on the farmers’ part to provide any specific food or amount of food. Trust and reputation are usually the only guides that customers have in making a decision to invest in a CSA.

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The unfortunate situation at Pete’s Greens highlights the real value in CSAs and how Community Supported Agriculture is supposed to work. In these times of financial uncertainty, investing in a local farm makes a lot of sense. Sure, there’s risk involved. You never know when weather conditions will cut a season short, an uncontrollable disease will wipe out an entire crop, or a greenhouse will be destroyed by a freak windstorm. But when you hand your money over to CSA farmers at the beginning of their season you can be certain that regardless of the challenges the coming growing season present, the farmers will be working their hardest to protect your investment. In fact, this deep sense of responsibility is why some farmers are no longer offering a community supported agriculture model for their farm. As one former CSA farmer told me, she would lie awake at night worrying about producing enough food to fulfill her commitment to her CSA customers. I don’t think that the executives at Lehman Brothers or GM were kept awake at night worrying about us little guys.

CSAs are cool, and investing in a local CSA helps farmers get a strong start for the season when their cash reserves are at their lowest. While there are CSAs that start up throughout the year depending on their focus, most get going in the spring so the timing couldn’t be better to consider how you might invest in a local farm this year. The NOFA Vermont website lists more than 100 CSAs in our state (see NOFAVT.org). If you grow your own vegetables, as I do, there are other types of CSAs that might make more sense. I belong to a flower CSA that I join in the spring and in exchange receive a beautiful bouquet each week throughout the summer and fall. I also join the High Mowing Seeds CSA each fall that gives me a 10-percent discount on my seed purchase in January. I couldn’t imagine a better way for Vermonters to invest their hard-earned money.
Vermont Food Sovereignty, continued from page 1

Annie White of the Health Freedom Alliance put it succinctly:

“We live in a Democracy? When you do a simple search of the bill that this resolution [the Vermont Food Sovereignty Resolution, cited below] stands against, the top links are to articles talking about what a devious and dangerous act it is, “a snake hissing in the grass.” The people spoke out heavily against S.510, so fervently that the passing was done in an underhanded, undemocratic way. Pushed through in a late-night proceeding right before Christmas and hidden in a spending bill, it was forced to passing by those in office in order that they may gain more power.”

What can Vermont do?

Wyoming, Georgia, and North Carolina introduced protective legislation to counter H.R. 2751. In Vermont, the Legislature remained silent; my House rep, Willem Jewett, refused comment and would not return e-mail. So a citizen legislative initiative called the Resolution for Food Sovereignty was created by a coalition of concerned citizens from all over the political spectrum. Details to follow.

Where is this all going?

Many regions of North America are moving toward a more independent culture of food production and distribution. This is counterpoint to growing centralized power – from Vermont towns to Montpelier, from sovereign states to D.C. The real political dichotomy is not between left and right, but between “statists” and “locals.” Statists believe that all aspects of our lives – such as education, food, planning, energy, finance – are better controlled by central authority. Top down. As Mr. Jewett says, the federal government is vital in preventing the states’ “race to the bottom.”

Locals are libertarians, the grassroots, embracing the traditional Vermont values of local control, small is beautiful.

What can you do? Speak with your legislators and be firm. If they won’t give this their attention, make noise, write letters to the editor, announce your candidacy to run against them in 2012.

What’s the strategy behind this federal food takeover? It’s happening in many countries, especially since the 2008 food crisis and financial collapse. The international investment community is vying for control over food supplies and agricultural land.

It’s all about land

Land, which includes all natural resources, opportunities, and rights, is the key to prosperity. When land can be controlled and monopolized by outside corporations, we are slaves. When we may not grow our own food on our land, is the land truly ours? If Vermont seceded, but corporations still controlled our rights, would Vermont truly be our own country?

We have a Legislature that gives away our rights to corporations and/or distant central governments. We are but a colony, not even a state. Whether we are called a state in a union, or an “independent” republic, it matters not.

Corruption

Corruption runs deep in the political machine. Vermont’s new Democrat governor killed the 2000 GMO-labeling act when it was in his Senate committee. According to the May 19, 2000, edition of the Rutland Herald, “… a measure mandating labels on genetically modified seeds and food, liability for the purveyors of the technology and registration of the location of transgenic crops with town clerks flew through the Senate Agriculture Committee. But its good fortunes ended in the Finance Committee. Democratic Sen. Peter Shumlin voted with Republicans to table the bill. Shumlin told Sen. Cheryl Rivers, then-chair of the Agriculture Committee, that he was unwilling to support a bill requiring labeling of genetically modified foods because the Democrats had already lost the contributions of pharmaceutical companies, and he was not willing to sacrifice contributions from the food industry,” the paper reported.

Follow the money

No thinking out-of-box in Montpelier this term. Leave economics to the “experts.” It’s too complicated.

But economics are simple for Vermonters: be frugal but live well, don’t spend money we don’t have, do better than previous generations, be involved in local politics but don’t trust politicians. Follow the money...

Following the money, the food/land takeover strategy worked wonders. By 2010, wheat futures had risen 47 percent, corn was up more than 50 percent, and soybeans 34 percent. All GMO.

The human cost was scarcely noticed by the urban and suburban public; after all, food is just something that shows up in the supermarket. But Wikileaks revealed that the U.S. was bully-
amounts of petrochemicals demanded by GMO crops, an ancient way of life was blotted out at a stroke. In the U.S. the huge agribusiness entities did well, Cargill announced a tripling of profits, generating $1.49 billion in three months between September and November 2010. Monsanto was similarly flush. Truly, an empire.

All this in an economic climate of failing business, desperate states, and municipalities that are hiking taxes and driving away the tax base, in which Treasury Bills pay a return of less than 1 percent. There is clearly no incentive to invest in productive business, to invest in the web of production and exchange. The earnings are on speculation, and in Vermont especially, the earnings of speculation are largely tax-free. “We have set up a global food system that supports speculation. And with [such] markets, we can’t get speculators out of the food business,” according to the Earth Policy Institute.

Vermont citizens have not waited for the Legislature to catch up; they declared that the FDA and federal government have no right to determine the food choices of the People of Vermont.

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The game of Monopoly
Economically, absolute control of an essential, like food, water, or access to land turns a free people into virtual slaves. Just play the game of Monopoly, invented by a Quaker woman to teach the principles of economics, and it is obvious. In Bolivia, Bechtel Corporation was given a monopoly over all the country’s water. It was forbidden for people to even collect rainwater. Water was for purchase from Bechtel Corporation. The World Bank put enormous pressure on Bolivia’s government: privatize the water supply or else… The Bolivian government passed a law making all drinkable water in Bolivia part of a “system,” with much ado about “safety.” A 40-year lease was granted to the California corporation to “administer” the newly created system. Bechtel was guaranteed a staggering 16-percent yearly rate of return on investment (the same as land speculators earn in Vermont).

This is what Georgist economists call Neoliberal Colonialism: not colonies of the 19th century, maintained by force with raw materials exported without compensation, but 20th and 21st century economic colonies – more subtle, politically correct, and even more profitable. Our resources, our natural rights, our food-growing capacity, become something that can be bought and sold and traded on Wall Street. Our labor benefits the absentee owner of those intangibles; our capital is expropriated. This is not capitalism, but an unsustainable system of forced growth.

Breaking the Monopoly
Vermont citizens have not waited for the Legislature to catch up; they have made a declaration that the FDA and federal government have no right to determine or restrict the food choices of the People of Vermont. “The Vermont Resolution for Food Sovereignty” was brought forth by the Vermont Coalition for Food Sovereignty. It makes a statement to the United States government and the FDA that all citizens who want to protect their freedom of food should stand behind.

The Coalition for Food Sovereignty is led by Jessica Bernier of Barre, a liberty activist. An outspoken stay-at-home mom of three, Bernier is primarily focused on issues that relate to individual liberty, food, and health freedom. In November Bernier organized the only nationwide protest against the Food Safety and Modernization Act. Bernier iterates that only Vermonters can decide what we eat and what we feed our children. Vermont must exercise its sovereign rights guaranteed by the Tenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

I recommend that you get with your Vermont House rep and senators, and demand that they take a stand on the following resolution, as written:

The Vermont Resolution for Food Sovereignty

WHEREAS All people are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, and among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness; and WHEREAS Food is human sustenance and is the fundamental prerequisite to life; and WHEREAS The basis of human sustenance rests on the ability of all people to save seed, grow, process, consume and exchange food and farm products; and WHEREAS We the People of Vermont, have an obligation to protect these rights as is the Common and Natural Law; and in recognition of the State’s proud agricultural heritage; and the necessity of agricultural, ecological and economic diversity and sustainability to a free and healthy Society; THEREFORE, Be it resolved, that We The People, stand on our rights under the 10th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and reject such Federal decrees, statutes, regulations or corporate practices that threaten our basic human right to save seed, grow, process, consume and exchange food and farm products within the State of Vermont; and, Be it further resolved that We The People shall resist any and all infringements upon these rights, from whatever sources that are contrary to the rights of the People of the State of Vermont.

This resolution is a clear exercise of our sovereign and natural rights as citizens of Vermont. Visit the Coalition’s site, VermontFoodSovereignty.net, to learn more and get involved!

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In late January, Vermont State Senator Ginny Lyons introduced a resolution into the Vermont General Assembly urging Congress to commence a constitutional amendment that “provides that corporations are not persons under the laws of the United States or any of its jurisdictional subdivisions.”

It was a year ago that the United States Supreme Court announced its decision in the case of Citizens United v. The Federal Election Commission. That case was the most recent decision in a century of legal precedent where the Court has advanced the legal fiction of corporate “personhood.” Initially, corporations in the United States were recognized as having rights to contract, and to have those contracts honored the same as contracts entered into by natural persons.

Corporate personhood first reached constitutional stature in 1886 in the case of Santa Clara vs. Southern Pacific Railroad Company, in which the Court interpreted the word “person” used in the Fourteenth Amendment to include corporations. Since then the Supreme Court has used this fiction to incrementally expand the scope of corporate rights. Citizens United held that corporations enjoy the same right of free speech as natural persons, and therefore, because of the Fourteenth Amendment guarantee of equal protection of the laws to all persons, campaign finance laws cannot limit corporate speech.

Politically speaking, Lyons’ proposed amendment is simple and sensible. Corporations are not the same thing as people. They don’t have feelings or thoughts. They don’t die and they don’t vote. They are merely a useful way of organizing resources. And yet we afford them constitutional rights as though they were human beings. It’s the equivalent of giving filing cabinets constitutional rights.

However, legally speaking, the proposed amendment is not a simple matter. Law is a complex tapestry. Changing the meaning of one word alters the meaning of the law in unexpected ways. For example, the Vermont Legislature has enacted a law that mandates, when interpreting statutes, that the word “person” shall include corporations. Currently in Vermont it is a crime for a “person” to receive stolen property. The proposed amendment would remove corporations from the criminal consequences of receiving stolen property. It would be an unintended consequence.

Similarly, Congress has enacted a law that states that whenever the word person is used in a statute it shall be construed to include corporations. So federal law, such as the Clean Water Act which limits the right of “persons” to discharge effluent, will no longer apply to corporations because corporations will no longer be considered persons. There are thousands of statutes and regulations that use the word “person” to regulate corporations. Do we want to annul these laws?

It would be a relatively simple task to revise our statutes through the political process. The hard-fought political victories of the past, such as our environmental laws, would have to be fought all over again.

It won’t be enough to strip corporations of their personhood. Even without that, corporations enjoy advantages that natural persons do not. Perhaps the biggest is that corporations don’t die, which provides them a rather large financial advantage. Under our laws, death is a taxable event. The government extracts a substantial tax from us when we die called the estate tax. The federal estate tax can be as high as 35 percent. Because corporations don’t die, they never pay this tax. But we ordinary mortals do. Our accumulated wealth is siphoned away from our families, while corporations retain their earnings in perpetuity.

Corporations are formed for the purpose of insulating their owners, called shareholders, from personal liability for corporate actions. Corporations have existed for centuries. Corporations founded most of the original 13 colonies. The State of Virginia was originally called The Virginia Company. In colonial times corporations were formed by an act of the Crown called a charter. In order to obtain a charter the incorporators were required to petition the Crown. Through their petition they had to demonstrate that they were men of substance and integrity (in those days only men were allowed this privilege), and they had to prove that their company’s purpose would serve the greater good of their country. Many of our country’s great universities were formed pursuant to royal charters. Corporate charters often had limitations such as expiration dates.

That was then. Now, in 2011, a corporation can be formed in Vermont by filing a simple form and paying a fee of $75. The Vermont Secretary of State issues the corporate charter to the incorporators regardless of their character or purpose. The corporation is presumed to be perpetual and the charter survives with no end date.

Vermont adopted a law that invoked this authority, called the Captive Insurance Act. So-called captive insurance companies, prior to incorporating, must state their corporate purpose, and must demonstrate the character, reputation, financial status, and purposes of its incorporators, officers and directors. Captives must demonstrate that they meet certain minimum capitalization requirements, and that their existence will benefit the State of Vermont. The Secretary of State may not accept an application for incorporation unless it is accompanied by a certificate from the commissioner of banking and insurance stating that the corporation has met the statutory threshold. Captives are subject to investment restrictions. They must have at least one Vermont resident on their board of directors and hold at least one board of directors meeting annually within the state. Captives are subject to audits every three years by state examiners, the expense of the audit charged to the company. Failure to comply with the law subjects the company to the threat of dissolution. None of these requirements, restrictions,
Burlington Kisses Lockheed?, continued from page 1
recent filibuster leader and viral web sensation, among its founders. Kiss, whose party has for 28 of the last 30 years controlled City Hall, was learning what many social movements that assume governmental control learn: wielding power without alienating the community organizers and social movements that put leaders into office can prove a difficult equation to balance.

That few details were available when the contractual letter of cooperation, adorned with Lockheed Martin’s corporate logo, was signed by Kiss and Lockheed’s senior vice president certainly didn’t assuage the rising indignation of community organizers. Interestingly, it was Mayor Kiss who approached Lockheed about the deal at the inaugural “Carbon War Room,” which took place simultaneously with the Vancouver Olympics. The Carbon War Room is a pet project of the 212th-richest person in the world, billionaire Sir Richard Branson, CEO of Virgin Group. “Sir” Branson, with his signature golden mullet, knows something about climate change. Branson’s record and cola empire also counts amongst its corporate family global warming contributors like Virgin Airlines and the quixotic, carbon-emissions nightmare of Virgin Galactic – space tourism for $200,000 a ticket.

Branson’s Carbon War Room partners cities with corporations like Lockheed and private financiers to create “market-based solutions” – better known as corporate profits from climate change.

world use innovative mechanisms to bring capital, energy technologies and jobs to their citizens in a sustainable and wealth creating way.” “Wealth creating” in this sense means privatizing existing not-for-profit climate-change-fighting measures like the PACE program (PACE lets U.S. homeowners bundle home renewable-energy financing into their mortgage, spreading out the payments over 25-30 years instead of the usual home-improvement loan term of five years). According to the Carbon War Room’s literature, the United States’ PACE market “is valued at $500 billion.”

This sort of privatization, which spins governmental nonprofit programs into new markets, and thereby into gold for corporate sponsors of the “War Room” like Lockheed, and billionaires like Branson, is but one of the objectionable pieces of the deal to its detractors. Throughout the 30-month Carbon War Room, and forever afterwards, there is no limit to how many times Burlington can be featured in Lockheed PR. Perhaps even more immediate and inflammatory is the planned interaction between Burlington’s school children and Lockheed Martin engineers.

“Are We For Bomb Makers?”

One of the controversial aspects of the deal would allow Lockheed engineers to work inside Burlington schools with schoolchildren. In the past five years Burlington parents’ and students’

Branson’s Carbon War Room partners cities with corporations like Lockheed and private financiers to create “market-based solutions” – better known as corporate profits from climate change.

outrage boiled over when war profiteer General Dynamics’ program of giving away pencils, book-marks, and books stamped with its corporate logo came to light. When a nine-year-old student at Burlington’s Champlain Elementary was faced with going to an assembly during the school day to listen to General Dynamics employees, her mom, Laurie Essig, says her daughter Willa asked, “Are we for bomb-makers? Do we think it’s right to kill people? Her basic question was, ‘Why are we treating these people like heroes?’”

Due to a perception on Willa’s teacher’s part – that nine-year-old Willa might offend the weapons manufacturers’ employees, the teacher “brought all the other students down to get their free books and left my daughter sitting alone in the classroom,” Essig says.

In a written statement regarding the Lockheed deal, Essig writes: “It saddens me that after so many parents and concerned citizens worked to come up with a thoughtful policy regarding corporations in our school district, the mayor of Burlington would so blatantly ignore the intent of that policy and invite Lockheed Martin into our schools. Citizens of Burlington and the school board made clear that we did not want our children to be used for public relations reasons, especially the sort of reputation-laundering that military contractors like Lockheed Martin or General Dynamics rely on so that no one pays much attention to the death and destruction they actually produce. Moral questions aside, there is the opportunity cost of giving over 50 percent of our federal tax revenues to the military/industrial complex, thereby making it impossible to adequately fund our schools in the first place. Lockheed Martin profits from war; our children do not, but then are expected to be grateful for whatever crumbs these corporations throw back at them.”

Essig’s words are reminiscent of those Martin Luther King used in his sermon, “Why I Oppose the War in Vietnam”: “A true revolution of values will soon cause us to question the fairness and justice of many of our present policies. True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar. A true revolution of values will soon look uneasily on the glaring contrast of poverty and wealth with righteous indignation. ... A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death.”

Even members of Mayor Kiss’ own party were

continued on page 12
Then there are the unspoken ironies of Lockheed working on climate change: the U.S. military, with all its Lockheed technologies, has a 363,000-barrel-per-day oil habit, making it the single-largest purchaser of oil in the world.

U.S. military were a country, it would be among the top 20 in annual oil consumption, well in front of the continental nation of Australia. As Chair of the County Progressive Chair Brooke said, “The military is the number-one enemy of sustainability, and Lockheed isn’t going to do much to change that as their money comes from manufacturing machines that are completely unsustainable. Their F35s use 2,000-4,000 gallons of fuel an hour.”

Environmental author Brian Tokar agrees: “Lockheed’s F-35s and other military hardware are among the most petroleum-gorging products in the world. Burlington doesn’t need their noisy fighter jets, nor should Vermont tolerate Lockheed’s feeble attempts to greenwash their image.”

City Councilor Emma Mulvaney-Stanak, of Bob Kiss’ Progressive Party, who wrote the resolution calling for transparency and community standards that passed on February 7, said in a statement, “When any municipality considers partnering with a corporation there needs to be some sort of conversation around a set of standards that passed on February 7, said in a statement, “When any municipality considers partnering with a corporation there needs to be some sort of conversation around a set of standards that reflect the community. With Burlington, those standards would need to include language to reflect issues long enshrined in the fabric of the city’s life: human rights issues, equality issues, peace and war issues. Any agreement or discussion needs to be guided by these community standards. Sometimes the money involved in a potential deal or partnership is not enough to compromise these principals. This deal, frankly, considering Lockheed’s long track record, would violate any reasonable community standards for the City of Burlington.”

And if that’s not enough…

According to non-partisan watchdog group the Project on Government Oversight’s Federal Contractor Misconduct Database, Lockheed Martin has had separate racial-, age-, and gender-discrimination lawsuits filed against it in the past two years alone. Does Mayor Kiss really want Burlington’s hard-won image attached to the world’s largest war profiteer, whose supervisors in the last 24 months allegedly allowed “death threats” and threats to “lynch” an African-American employee to “continue unabated – even though the company was aware of the unlawful conduct”? One might think all of the above flies in the face of the subsections of Kiss’ Progressive Party’s platform which state that the party will “insist Vermont will contract only with responsible employers, including local small businesses and entrepreneurs, hiring local employees,” and promote cooperative, worker-owned, and publicly owned enterprises as democratic alternatives to huge profit-driven multinational corporations.”

Author Naomi Klein writes that when George W Bush needed a media campaign to sell the case for going to war with Iraq, he turned to Lockheed Martin. Nixon and Reagan cabinet member George Shultz, teamed with Lockheed officials Bruce Jackson, Charles Kupperman, and Douglas Graham, were the unofficial ”Committee for the Liberation” of Iraq. There’s a good chance you heard their Lockheed-manufactured sound bites on VPR and WCAX or read them in your local paper. As a special thanks, Lockheed’s troubled B-2 Stealth Bomber was given the mother of all product placements: the leading role in the live-broadcast 2003 invasion of Iraq. Lockheed’s stock almost tripled, from $41 per share to $102 per share.

Now Burlington is about to bring the results home to roost. According to Hartung, “Since the 1950s Lockheed has been at the forefront of industry diversification” so as to ensure against a downturn in profits during peacetime like Lockheed experienced as the end of WWII. As Lockheed President Robert Gross put it in his reflection on the immediate postwar situation, “As long as I live I will never forget those short, appalling weeks.”

To that end, a recent article in The Nation points out, Lockheed “now does work for more than two dozen government agencies, from the Department of Defense and the Department of Energy to the Department of Agriculture and the Environmental Protection Agency. It’s involved in surveillance and information gathering for the CIA, the FBI, the Internal Revenue Service, the National Security Agency, the Pentagon, the Census Bureau, and the Postal Service. Oh, and Lockheed Martin has even helped train those friendly Transportation Security Administration agents who pat you down at the airport.”

Lockheed has “moved beyond anything usually associated with a weapons corporation and has been virtually running its own foreign policy, doing everything from hiring interrogators for U.S. overseas prisons (including at Guantánamo Bay in Cuba and Abu Ghraib in Iraq) to managing a private intelligence network in Pakistan and helping write the Afghan constitution.”

Klein writes of the war in Iraq, “Since every possible aspect of both deconstruction and reconstruction has been outsourced and privatized, there’s an economic boom when the bombs start falling, when they stop, and when they start up again – a closed profit loop of destruction and reconstruction, of tearing down and building up. For companies that are clever and farsighted
like Halliburton and the Carlyle Group, the destroyers and re-builders are different divisions of the same corporations.” So far are we down this path that “The actual government has lost the ability to perform its core functions without the help of contractors. When Katrina hit FEMA had to hire a contractor to award contracts to the contractors.”

So it should be unsurprising that the same Lockheed would see local climate change efforts as merely its next emerging market, in trying to create that closed profit loop of destruction and reconstruction, of tearing down and building up. Unless we act, Burlington will be its laboratory.

Strange bedmates: Lockheed and grassroots organizers

What isn’t immediately clear is what’s left for Lockheed engineers to do around climate change in Burlington that isn’t currently being done by Burlington’s many NGOs, nonprofits, and local companies without war-profiteer logos on their arms – from award-winning Efficiency Vermont to AgRefresh, from the University of Vermont’s Gund Institute to Burlington Walk/Bike Council, from Carshare Vermont to 350.org, from Permaculture Burlington to the local-vore movement, and on and on. Even the city’s Department of Public Works is involved, installing rainwater gardens into the very street itself.

But if it were an anonymous benefactor

Lockheed couldn’t ride Burlington’s credibility to the bank, and credibility is the only thing war profiteers like Lockheed Martin can’t buy.

In 2007, Lockheed admitted it had overcharged, and would repay, the federal government $265 million plus interest for over-billing American taxpayers on the same F-35. Lockheed called the over-billing “inadvertent.” Tokar says, “Lockheed’s F-35s and other military hardware are among the most petroleum-gorging products in the world. Burlington doesn’t need their noisy fighter jets, nor should Vermont tolerate Lockheed’s feeble attempts to greenwash their image.”

That said, if this pact between Burlington and Lockheed were purely a results-based, most-sustainability-bang-for-the-buck venture, and not about corporate greenwashing, couldn’t Lockheed silently fund the many engineers and community organizers who have been doing climate-change and sustainability work inside Burlington for decades, often with little resources? If Lockheed wanted to get the most climate-change prevention for its investment, without causing ripples, couldn’t it silently dovetail with Burlington’s award-winning Climate Action Plan and the 200 project ideas it generated? Unlike the Lockheed deal, the Climate Action Plan had many opportunities for public input.

Or perhaps this funding could quietly award under-capitalized companies like Efficiency Vermont, whose low-income home-weatherization program has a two-year waiting list. Additionally there is an unfunded Chittenden County Metropolitan Planning Organization study on how physical barriers to separate bike lanes from car traffic would positively or negatively impact downtown business. In many cities where the study has been done, including places as large as New York City, physical barriers to demarcate bike lanes from car traffic have been shown to create safer, friendlier communities, which increases bike use while simultaneously helping businesses thrive. Absent the capital for the study, though, the false “it’s bad for business” argument will prevent these bike-lane improvements – even though one climate-change consultant estimated the cost to be about $10,000, or one-fifth of one second in Iraq-war spending.

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The need for action in Burlington

In an exclusive meeting with Mayor Kiss, he told me that the Lockheed Carbon War Room was not the only way to finance the projects he envisaged the City of Burlington taking on, merely

“...to say that, as usual, everything depends on community organizers building a countervailing pressure to the moneyed interests of corporations and the military – a pressure so strong that the elected officials will have no choice but to do the moral, just, and right thing.

Here are the details for contacting the Mayor’s office:

Call: 802-865-7272 (Mayor’s Office)
Email: mayor@ci.burlington.vt.us

An earlier version of this article appeared on TowardsFreedom.com •
Fleeing
It’s not surprising that we still call this continent the “New World.” Relative to the first peoples in America, who have lived here for about 3,000 to 12,000 years, we just got off the boat. And so far we don’t seem intent on staying. We were taught in school that the American frontier closed in the 19th century, yet the same boom-bust cycle endemic to the frontier mentality has continued into the 21st, shifting from the Appalachians, to the Prairies, to the West, to the Rust Belt, to Silicon Valley and the Sun Belt.

Now – finally – we’re almost out of both places to live and out of places from which to extract our living. Our distant sources of labor, food, energy, water, and rare-earth elements are running dry. Africa won’t feed China for very long, nor can Canada and the Amazon feed and fuel the U.S. for more than a handful of decades. Though we fled from distant lands to America, we continue to live much like refugees, constantly moving from one place to another, never staying long enough to cultivate the richest values possible in a specific place. In doing so we’ve traded uniqueness for the generic, culture for commerce. Even those of us who can afford to usually don’t stick around long enough to harvest the fruits of our labor – nomads not seeking safety but “success.”

Yet, we need the opposite kind of culture – a people that mean to stay. Strangely, running out of places to go and resources to plunder may be what we need most. It’s easy to wreck a place when you know you can move on to the next. Without another place to go, might we finally be forced to open our eyes to what’s at hand? To gaze not at a distant horizon but at the ground beneath our feet? Then might we ask, “What can I do here? What can I make of this place?”

This transformation is inevitable and will happen whether we engage it or not; the earth is finite and we’re spectacularly overshooting our resource base. This shift will also not be only personal, but cultural.

“Staying” seems to be one of the key ingredients to a livable culture and to any civilization that can last beyond a few centuries, especially in the modern age. Rootlessness is simply not a viable operating system in a high-tech (high-footprint) world with billions of humans, and it begets a mindset of conquest, a broken chain of cause and effect, not of accountability. Indeed “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” seems hinged upon close feedback loops between action and consequence. That can only happen in a settled society, in cultures where ‘home’ and community are central, where the individual is embedded in a long chain of generations, inheriting from those before, leaving for those who will come after.

Fortunately this pattern is hardly new. The instances in which human groups have sustained themselves in specific places for millennia occur where cultural and economic (resource) systems were organized not to maximize wealth for the individual but to grow and transfer value enduringly. This kind of value takes decades and human generations. Not moving to the next place has been the only way we’ve built wealth enduringly. This kind of value takes decades and centuries to develop: barns spilling over with the autumn harvest, apples stacked high to last through a winter, disease-resistant crops from hedgerow to hedgerow, towering groves of nut trees, abundant herds of game, lush pasture and sturdy animals, vigorous people mastering their work, cultural memory. Human culture can create all of these conditions – even thriving ecosystems. But it takes generations of people skillfully committed to each other, and to a place, to do so.

Our task, then, at the dawn of the third millennium, is to transition from a society based in mining the most value as quickly as possible to a long-haul culture living not on the principal but of the interest. So, how do we develop perpetual, interest-bearing systems from which we can live? We can start by looking at those places where human inhabitation has lasted millennia – and to those who dwelled and did not despoil their homes.

Dwelling
In difficult dry regions of the Iberian Peninsula a complex agroforestry system based heavily upon the interactions between an oak-and-chestnut overstory and a grazed understory (using pigs and small cows especially), called the Dehesa...
system, was devised. Grazing animals were rotated through the woodlands with animals thriving primarily on the produce of the trees. The nuts offered a wellspring of fat and protein from year to year, with no pruning, no fertilizing (other than animal rotations), little disease pressure, no irrigation, and no bare soil, no erosion, complete groundwater recharging/moisture retention. This kind of land use is the opposite of desertification.

The productivity of the Dehesa system has been found to be higher per-unit-area than any version of modern agriculture in Spain, when comparing for all inputs and outputs. At the same time, the quality of the systems' outputs is superior to those of modern agriculture: chestnut-fed swine has long been regarded as one of the finest meats in the world, as flavorful as it is dense in nutrients, beyond comparison to grain-fed meats. The savannah-mimicking Dehesa silvo-pastoral systems were so widespread, evolved, and practiced for so many centuries that until the 20th century many ecologists did not recognize the anthropogenic origins of these ecosystems. As the agroforestry practices of planting, cutting, pruning, and grazing waned in the modern era, so too has the diversity of “wild” life in these woodlands, while springs dried up, soil-building slowed, and the region has become more arid, brittle, and less productive.

In what is now California, the Sierra Miwok, Yokuts, Chumash, and at least dozen other first peoples developed perennial, fire-managed ecosystems that grew a stunning abundance of game along with medicinal plants in the understory of black oak-dominated woodlands. Peoples in California also developed systems based around sugar pine, hazelnut, and other masting and often exceptionally long-lived plants, using fire, transplanting, and selective cutting rather than grazing (having none of the domesticable animals available in Eurasia). In the Sierra Nevada Mountains Wabanaki, Algonquian, and Mahican peoples, the Abenaki, Huron, Iroquois, Manhattan, Massachuset, Narragansett, Penobscot, Seneca, Shinnecock and others promoted an intergenerational food, fuel, fiber, and medicine ecosystem whose foundation was the mast-bearing tree: oak, walnut, hickory, chestnut, butternut, pine, beech, hazelnut (they did not yet have the apple from Asia).

The earliest European accounts of this land describe an open “park-like understorey, everywhere growing oake and walnut.” These visitors thought they had encountered an unusually beautiful wilderness. But, as has become clear, this was no wilderness, but a continental-scale forest garden whose crops were trees, the game they sustained and understory plants. As in other

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Running out of places to go and resources to plunder may be what we need most.

It's easy to wreck a place when you know you can move on to the next.

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individual sugar pine groves were often tended by single clans, climbed and harvested from for a dozen or more human generations (sugar pines can yield rich pine-nuts for 300-500 years). Imagine harvesting food from a tree that your great grandfather planted, that your grandfather then climbed to harvest nuts from, that your father climbed and rested beneath, whose seeds your mother made a flour to from nourish you, that your son will feed your grandchildren from, that your grandchildren, when the tree dies, will use the wood for shelter, the inner bark for medicines, the resin for fire-starter, the needles as incense in a ceremony for the tree and for the lives which the tree made possible. Such is the life of a people who live close to trees, intentional in their legacy.

Over a period of at least 100 human generations those dwelling in eastern North America guided the development of vast food forests. The regions of the world where cultures figured out how to dwell for thousands of years in a single place, the tools and techniques of choice were fire, hunting, selective cutting, promoting the largest, most-useful seeds, and dispersing them (think Johnny Butternut) and a deep awareness of seasonal cycles to properly time these activities.

Energy cycling

Why are trees – especially nut trees – at the basis of these regenerative land systems and highly adapted human cultures? In the simplest terms, it has to do with inputs and outputs. A nut tree is simply more effective and efficient at converting sunlight and precipitation into value, over the long term, than any other technology humans have yet designed.

This becomes clear when comparing biological systems in general with non-living technologies. Consider a photovoltaic panel or wind turbine. Each requires large and damaging inputs to generate single outputs. What are the inputs for a photovoltaic panel? Bauxite from which to smelt the aluminum frame, silicon and numerous other minerals (many only found in difficult-to-access and a dwindling number of places on the planet), and myriad other mined and smelted metals and minerals. These all must be mined, transported, refined, transported again, then fabricated, then shipped again. All for one output: electricity.

What are the inputs required for a nut tree? An exchange between breeder and planter, transporting of the seed or seedling, some woodchip mulch, rain, and sunshine. And time. What are its yields? Oxygen, soil, wildlife food and housing, moisture retention, carbon sequestration, air filtration, human food, stock feed, building materials, shade, windbreak, and beauty, to name a few.

The former resource path – the abiotic – provides us with a practical service at great cost. The latter, biological (or “soft”) path creates an enduring and generative legacy of positive value. And whereas a solar panel or wind turbine or green building offers diminishing yields over time, a nut tree’s output actually increases, for at least the first century or two of its lifetime.

Such is the power – and imperative – of biological systems: they are the only means we have of sidestepping entropy, at least for significant periods of time, on this planet. That’s what tips the balance; it all comes down to capture, storage, and transfer. The best system is the one that can harvest the most sunlight and moisture, then store that value for the longest period of time while converting some of it into products and services that other living things, like humans, can use. And biological systems do this very well, while non-living mechanical systems cannot.

In the modern era enough research has been done to quantify the advantage of cropping with trees over annual crops. Accepted yields for chestnut, for example, are 800 to 1,500 pounds.
That rivals modern corn production on deep-soil land. However, corn only produces such a crop with constant labor and fertility inputs each year while reducing the land’s capacity to produce due to its erosive forces on the soil. A chestnut orchard, on the other hand, actually improves the land’s (and climate’s) capacity from year to year while it yields; it requires no bare soil or fertility inputs, and it produces hundreds of annual yields from each plant on marginal/shallow-soiled land (far more of the earth’s cover type than deep-soiled land), while taking up less space than corn. As well, you can crop the same area with other species simultaneously: e.g., a chestnut orchard is also a pasture, also a game preserve/farm, also a place for understory berries and medicinal.

All in all you can grow about three to eight times the product value (protein, fat, carbohydrate, BTUs and other nutrients/values) via a tree crop system like chestnut than an annual, input-dependent crop like corn, and you can do so while improving the land from decade to decade.

Annual cropping, year after year, always leads to a ruined soil and culture. Mesopotamia, much of Greece, and many other empires were once forested; now they are deserts. Despite abundant human cleverness we haven’t invented a better way to store energy than a stack of firewood. We haven’t yet devised a more effective means of capturing solar energy than by putting up a cow and hay in a barn through the winter. Biological energy harvesting and storage is what has allowed us to survive to this point, and our experiments of replacing biological systems with mechanical and chemical systems have at best been delayed catastrophes. We must rely on non-biological aspects of organismal systems to work here: A tractor and horse are comparable in the amount of work they can achieve on a small piece of land, yet after a time the tractor dies and the horse makes another horse. Only life processes are regenerative. As such, our prospects for thriving on this planet depend upon our ability to partner with life forces.

Reinvestment
Life, however, can be slow. Who can wait decades for a return on investment?
Actually, most of us do already: pensions, Social Security, mortgages. A nut tree beats an IRA, hands down, on a strictly monetary basis alone (not counting all the side-yields). Indeed, one could consider such an investment a “collective retirement account,” maturing in 10-20 years and yielding ever-increasing returns for its first 100-200 years at least. Stone (nut) pines, which populate huge swathes of the Siberian taiga and are amenable to Vermont’s climate and soils, often bear for 400 years. Go gamble on Lehman Brothers for a 100-year return.

Your apple tree, however, can easily do that. Planted for $100 and tended to at a cost of $50 per year, the tree will yield roughly 50,000 pounds ($150,000 worth at $3/pound) of fruit in its first decade – a total return on investment (ROI) of 2,841 percent and an annualized rate of return of 7.1 percent (almost exactly the same as a 50/50 bond/stock portfolio over the last 100 years). If you don’t count your time pruning and harvesting, and chalked that up to family fun, your overall ROI would be 150,000 percent in 100 years. Over 50 years your A.P.R. would be 15.8 percent – not slow money.

Trees are one of the only financial instruments we can rationally depend upon for long-term returns on investment. Perhaps this is why humans have invested in trees for millennia and in banks for a brief moment in time. Unlike an IRA or Social Security, barring a lightning strike your family’s nut tree carries a guarantee that the U.S. Treasury can’t make (even if it wasn’t bankrupt); it simply hasn’t been around long enough.

One can find mature nut trees today that started yielding before the U.S. existed. Similarly, one can plant a tree today that will likely be bearing after this nation’s lifespan is over. On the thousands of pounds of value falling from your tree year after year, you will pay not a cent of tax. The value is all for you – and for the squirrel, the owl, the soil, the groundwater, the climate, and your children.

Imagine inheriting a food forest. Imagine creating one. Planting season begins when the ground thaws, and ends at leaf-out. Your intergenerational legacy can begin today.
Spring is here, or nearly so, the days expanding with sun and warmth, like slowly ripening fruit. This is the time of year we take measure of the hay, restacking and counting the remaining square bales, then dividing the tally by the number of critters times the number of days until middle May, when the pastures will have fully awakened. I love to handle hay in winter, each bale a compressed piece of sunlight. It is like touching summer.

This is the time of year when we begin to ration the last sticks of firewood, mindful of the cold April rains to come, and promising ourselves that this year we’ll put up an extra cord. Knowing, even as we do, that we won’t.

And this is the time of year we get ourselves into trouble. This is because in March everything and anything seems possible. The ground is still covered in snow; the daily chores still a winter-time fraction of summer’s unconquerable list of tasks. In March, the days feel longer than at any other time of the year, for the ratio of duties-to-daylight tilts steeply in daylight’s favor, and we find ourselves looking for tasks to fill the dusk to its blackened end. In March, we feel the excitement of the coming season swelling in our chests, but rather than stealing space from our breaths, it somehow expands them too, and our bodies and minds go a little crazy with all that oxygen.

We are not fools; we know of our mortality, our vulnerabilities, our limits. For eleven, maybe eleven-and-a-half months of the year, they are ever-present, a constant reminder that the human condition is one of acceptance. But in mid-March, for a sweet, brief time, we fly above these constraints.

This is all well and good, but of course March is when commitments to the summer are made. The piglets are procured (and why not get a half-dozen this year?), the meat birds are ordered (hell yeah, let’s do 200!), the final garden plans are writ in ink (amaranth! Let’s try amaranth!). I do not bemoan these choices, which we make in some form or another every spring and which we revisit, in some form or another, every autumn, wondering how it was that we thought we could do so much. I do not bemoan them because they evolve of something as close to purity as I possess: The affection I hold for our little farm, and the excitement that affection invokes. We make these choices because we cannot imagine not making them, because not making them would be too rational for the strength of our feelings.

On our land there are certain spots where, time and again, I am afforded a view that encompasses so much of what I have come to love about it. Down past the blueberries, a little knoll from which I can see the house and barn and greenhouse, the largest of our three gardens, and the sweep of meadow before it. Or along the bottom edge of the new pasture, looking up the hill, the cows backlit by early morning sun.

There is no logic to the power these views hold over me; they are merely certain angles of the same elements I can see from hundreds of vantage points. Grass. Trees. Animals. Home. There is no logic, but then, I do not ask for or expect it. I accept the gift of these views much as I accept the love of my family, the gift of my animals’ milk and meat, the bounty of the fields and forest that surround me.

There is, of course, plenty of room on a farm for logical thought. Indeed, no farm can survive without it; nobody can survive without it. But I am beginning to understand that it is okay to surrender myself to the irrational exuberance that visits us each March, much as I surrender myself to those views. I am beginning to understand that the gift of that exuberance is a greater thing than the recriminations it sometimes gives rise to.

And so I can only wonder: In what other ways should I surrender? •
In 1998 the Vermont Legislature passed H.605, which allowed in Vermont a practice known as “net metering.” Net metering is a relatively recent concept in which state law requires electric utilities to permit customers to generate their own power using small-scale renewable energy systems. If they generate more power than they can use, the excess power can be fed back to their utilities, which actually runs their electric meters backwards. When that happens they receive credit on their electric bills, at the utility’s retail rate, for the kilowatt-hours (kWh) they provide to the company. (Vermont’s net-metering law does not allow them to receive cash income for that power.) Net metering means that small-scale renewable energy systems don’t require batteries to achieve the full benefit of their power production.

Because of recent cost reductions and state and federal incentives, a net-metered solar electric (PV) system on a south-facing roof can pay for itself in less than 10 years and provide 20-plus years of free power after that. A 4,000-watt PV system today costs about $14,000 after the 30-percent federal tax credit and the $1/watt Vermont rebate, and would cover about 80 percent of the average residential power demand in Vermont. Five years ago this system would have cost more than $35,000 after incentives.

Assuming utility rates continue increasing at the current pace of about 5 percent per year, a 4,000-watt PV system would save you about $35,000 during the 25-year warranty period of the panels.

The current state law about net metering – known as Title 30, Chapter 5, Section 219a of the Vermont statues – has been amended several times, including in 2007 and 2009 when group-net-metering rules were established and amended. Off-site group net-metering is important because less than half of home/office roofs are suitable for solar power, and wind turbines aren’t allowed by most residential and commercial zoning laws.

The amendments in 2007 and 2009 were touted by many as “landmark legislation” for expanding the allowed size of net-metered systems and for including provisions for group net metering. In 2008, I was told by administrators of the Clean Energy Development Fund that the new group-net-metering rules were cutting edge, putting Vermont ahead of just about every state by forcing power companies to allow offsite group-net-metering projects.

I’ve been involved in attempting to organize two group-net-metering projects, one for a wind turbine and one for solar power. (Micro hydro-power is nearly impossible to do because of federal regulations.) Group net metering, in theory, allows a group of people to install a renewable energy system that feeds power directly into the grid without the system needing to be located on their property, while each member of the group can have their share of the monthly power production applied to their residential/commercial power bill by the power company. In Colorado the Community Energy Cooperative has developed software programs that automatically inform the power company how much credit is to be distributed to the individual accounts of each member of the group.

However, there is a fundamental flaw in the current net-metering rules in Vermont: all members of the group must combine their individual utility bills and accounts into one utility account. This can work if you own a business and you combine your business and home power bill into one account, with a solar system that offsets your combined monthly power bill.

But this poses large challenges for a group of 30 people who invest in a wind turbine or solar farm. They would have to develop internal bill-reconciliation, meter-reading and accounting administrative processes. Someone would have to...
CHASING CHILES: Hot Spots Along the Pepper Trail

By Kurt Michael Friese, Kraig Kraft, & Gary Paul Nabhan

An excerpt from the Introduction

The world around us is changing in ways we don’t always take time to notice or have the perspective to understand. To even begin to comprehend these changes, we sometimes need to contrive an excuse, a mission, that is, any old reason that allows us to break away from our ordinary routines so that we may see the earth with fresh eyes. With this in mind, the three of us—Gary, the ethnobotanist, Kraig, the agro-ecologist and Kurt, the chef—discussed with one another how best to approach a problem like the effects of climate change on our food system. Together, we considered how we might bring new and different perspectives to the table—including the voices of folks whose points of view have yet to contribute to the discussion. And somewhat audaciously, we decided to narrow our focus to a single, albeit iconic, food, as a means to facilitate such a discussion. We were going to listen to farmers and chefs, so that we could hear how they felt climate change was affecting them and their livelihoods.

Yes, that’s right, climate change: everyone’s issue and no one’s issue. It’s a topic with geophysical, ecological, social, and political dimensions, but saying anything precise about it seems difficult and very very contentious at best. That is because predictions about climate change—at least at this point in time—are prone to be educated guesses and are therefore fraught with some level of uncertainty. Still, while the details of the degree of change, the rates of change, as well as the when and whys of climate change are still up for debate, the change itself is not.

In order to move the discussion forward, some scientists now prefer to call it global climatic destabilization. In The New York Times, journalist Thomas Friedman proposed that we dump the term global warming altogether, and replace it with global weirding. The injection of the term weirding implies increasing uncertainty; it concedes that we are not only facing the prospect of an increasingly warmer planet, but one subject to extreme weather events, with more droughts and deluges than previously expected. We just don’t know exactly how it will affect the lives—tangibly and on the ground—of food plants, livestock, and humans in any particular locality at any point in time.

The notion that we should “go out and look for climate change” was so huge and amorphous as an idea that we feared we could not say it out loud without someone laughing at us. Yet the three of us, representing three very different livelihoods, decided to dedicate a year of our lives to discerning how accelerated climate change and other factors might already be affecting the diversity of foods grown on this earth. We were going out to the farm fields and into the kitchens to find out. For if these pressures were diminishing the availability and diversity of certain foods, there was a very real chance that they could also disrupt the food security of our families, our closest friends, and our neighbors.

As a young student prophetically told Gary, the oldest of the three of us: “Climate change will be the fundamental issue which shapes what members of my generation do or don’t do for the rest of our lives, perhaps just like civil rights was the issue for your generation.”

Nevertheless, we sensed that we needed to make such an all-encompassing issue as food and climate change a bit more tangible when talking to our friends, and frankly, to ourselves as well. We needed to refocus the mission, to define the boundaries. Our mission would be based around an iconic food that had a fervent following and distinct regional variation in cuisines and products. Wine? Cheese? Beer? No. It was none of these. We would be going on a pepper pilgrimage to the “hot spots” of our continent—the landscapes where unique chiles are grown and are part of the local cultural fabric. Yes, chile peppers were what we sought and why we traveled so many miles. We had pledged like blood brothers to be gastronoms, explorers on what our friend Blake Edgar called a “spice odyssey.”

In truth, our purpose was more nuanced than that: We had set out to explore one symbolic food—the chile pepper in all its myriad forms—and how shifting weather has been affecting the pepper’s own destiny and the destinies of those who habitually harvest or cook with chiles. We could have chosen any iconic food to serve as our lens for examining climate change, but we had our own personal reasons for selecting peppers.

Even before we left on our spice odyssey, we knew very well what the prophetic voices like those of Al Gore and Bill McKibben had warned about impending climate change, as well why naysayers like Rush Limbaugh and David Bellamy were skeptical that such changes were truly evident. We were appreciative of how Anna Lappé had been working to alert everyone from iPodded students to TV-watching couch potatoes that “the climate crisis is at the end of your fork” through her proposing a Diet for a Hot Planet. But we were also painfully aware that the American Farm Bureau Federation’s President Bob Stallman had come out against climate change legislation, drawing a line in the sand between his membership and activists concerned with the way certain industrial agricultural practices may be aggravating global climate change:

A line must be drawn between our polite and respectful engagement with consumers and how we must aggressively respond to extremists who want to drag agriculture back to the days of 40 acres and a mule . . . At the very time when we need to increase our food production, climate change legislation threatens to slash our ability to do so. The world will continue to depend upon food from the United States. To throttle back our ability to produce food—at a time when the United Nations projects billions of more mouths to feed—is a moral failure.

Who we had not heard from in a satisfactory way were the people who stood to lose the most from radically shifting weather patterns, which appeared to be increasing the severity and/or frequency of hurricanes, floods, and droughts, whatever their immediate causes. They were North America’s own farmers and foragers, its chefs and cooks—folks from all the walks of life that bring us our daily bread, our daily tortillas, and, of course, our daily salsa. Although the Farm Bureau calls itself the Voice of American Agriculture, we wanted to hear the diversity of voices on the land that national organizations often fail to listen to let alone represent.

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Some people are so uncomfortable with any tension produced by conflict that they comply with any authority. Such children are unlikely to get into trouble with teachers. These are not the kids whom teachers “suggest” need to be taken for a medical evaluation. Actually, because they are more comfortable in standardized institutions, these are the children who are more likely to become teachers, psychiatrists, or psychologists.

One of the lessons I did learn in my professional training was just how extraordinarily compliant the majority of mental health professionals are. Moreover, they are often unaware of how extremely obedient they are. Gaining acceptance into graduate school or medical school and achieving a PhD or MD means jumping through many meaningless hoops, all of which require much behavioral, attentional, and emotional compliance to authorities, even those authorities that one lacks respect for.

On more than one occasion in my training to be a psychologist I was informed that I had “issues with authorities,” and I had mixed feelings about being so labeled. On the one hand, I found it quite flattering. I had in my youth considered myself, at least compared with many other kids in my neighborhood, relatively compliant. After all, I had done my homework, studied, received good grades, and never had any legal problems. However, while this “issues with authority” label made me grin because I was now being seen as a “bad boy,” it also very much concerned me. Specifically, if they were labeling someone such as myself with “authority issues,” what were they calling the kids I grew up with who were far more noncompliant with disrespected authorities but quite enjoyable with everyone else?

Roland Chrisjohn is a psychologist and a professor in the Native Studies Department at St. Thomas University, and he is also an Oneida of the Iroquois Nation. He says, “Protect me from my ‘friends.’” What does he mean? He explains that while his enemies on the right murdered indigenous Americans to steal their land, Indians’ so-called liberal friends forced assimilation through boarding schools that prohibited the use of tribal languages and customs, which made it easier to divide and conquer—and then “legally” rip them off. While the right favored massacres and were fond of saying, “The only good Indian is a dead Indian,” the liberals preferred “curing” indigenous Americans and came up with sayings like, “Kill the Indian to save the child.”

When I publicly question the wisdom of prescribing drugs to kids in order to get them to be manageable in a classroom, I get superficially different but essentially the same reactions from self-identified conservatives and liberals.

The conservative reacts, “Yeah, these kids don’t need medication. They need their parents to get tough with them and show them who’s boss. These teachers have their hands tied by liberals. Too much coddling has ruined America.”

The liberal reacts, “While I agree that some children are incorrectly diagnosed and improperly medicated, my son was getting F’s in school until he was prescribed Ritalin, and now he is headed for college.”

No doubt both whippings and drugs can be effective in inducing compliance. However, similar to America’s liberal-conservative “Indian problem” debate, something is missing from the liberal-conservative “problem child” debate. What’s missing is the possibility that nothing is essentially wrong with these kids. What’s missing is the possibility that they simply don’t fit into the dominant culture. What’s missing is the possibility that perhaps there is something admirable about these young people’s rebellion against authoritarian hierarchies and manipulative relationships. The good news is that some parents do “get it” and are able to have happier families. Two ways of subduing defiance are to criminalize it and to pathologize it, and US history is replete with examples of both. In the same era that John Adams’s Sedition Act criminalized criticism of US governmental policy, Dr. Benjamin Rush, the father of American psychiatry (his image adorns the American Psychiatric Association seal), pathologized anti-authoritarianism. Dr. Rush diagnosed those rebelling against a centralized federal authority as having an “excess of the passion for liberty” that “constituted a form of insanity,” and he labeled this illness “anarchia.” Throughout American history, both direct and indirect resistance to authority has been pathologized.

In an 1831 article in the New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal, Louisiana physician Samuel Cartwright reported his discovery of “dysaesthesia aethiopis,” a disease that caused slaves to flee captivity. Dr. Cartwright also reported his discovery of “etomania,” the disease that caused slaves to discover against a centralized federal authority as having an “excess of the passion for liberty” that “constituted a form of insanity,” and he labeled this illness “anarchia.” Throughout American history, both direct and indirect resistance to authority has been pathologized.

In every generation there will be elitists and authoritarians, and there will also be genuine anti-authoritarians who are so pained by exploitative hierarchies that they take action. While it is unusual in American history for these anti-authoritarians to take the kind of effective direct action that inspires others to successfully revolt, every once in a while a Tom Paine or Saul Alinsky comes along. So authoritarians take no chances. They criminalize anti-authoritarianism, pathologize it, market drugs to “cure” it, and financially intimidate those who might buck the system.

An anti-authoritarian nightmare is that every would-be Tom Paine and Saul Alinsky gets diagnosed as a youngster with mental illness and is quieted with a lifelong regimen of chill pills. Preventing that nightmare from coming true is a major reason for my involvement in mental health treatment reform.
The following excerpt is from The Color of Atmosphere: One Doctor’s Journey In and Out of Medicine by Maggie Kozel.

My journey through medicine is in many ways a very personal story. Like any other doctor on the planet, my attitudes and perspectives were shaped to a significant degree by where I came from, and who influenced me. But my personal journey plays out against the backdrop of our changing health care system and is intertwined with it. As the story of my career moves from the bubble of academia, through the military system, and on into managed care and private practice, this book becomes not just about me, but also about how our method of paying for health care, with its complicated array of incentives and disincentives, profoundly influences the way medicine is practiced and the quality of care that is delivered.

We all need to understand the way that our reimbursement methods have shaped the way medicine is practiced. Otherwise, our attempts to improve the quality and accessibility of health care, as well as its cost-effectiveness, are likely to miss the mark. In our “health-industrial complex,” standards of medical practice and public health policy are set in the boardrooms of insurance companies as much as they are in the halls of academia. Now, more than ever, clinical decisions are based on who gets paid for what. Pediatricians are managing serious psychiatric conditions, diagnosing learning disorders, trying to convince myself as well as my patients that my office was the most appropriate place for this to happen. I patiently played along with obsessive discussions on toilet training, trying to rationalize the toll such indulgence took on precious health care dollars. I tried to meet parents’ expectations—to get the child to sleep through the night, or get back to day care, or not be sick on Thanksgiving—as if these things, and not the dangers of over-intervention, were the more serious health concerns. In short, I, like my colleagues, helped put the dye in what had become a dysfunctional relationship. In the process, I moved farther and farther away from what I was trained to do, to the point that I almost couldn’t recognize the doctor I had become.

As patient’s attitudes change, physician behavior changes as well. Like most pediatricians, I did my part to put a scientific spin on our approach to learning disorders, trying to convince myself as well as my patients that my office was the most appropriate place for this to happen. I patiently played along with obsessive discussions on toilet training, trying to rationalize the toll such indulgence took on precious health care dollars. I tried to meet parents’ expectations—to get the child to sleep through the night, or get back to day care, or not be sick on Thanksgiving—as if these things, and not the dangers of over-intervention, were the more serious health concerns. In short, I, like my colleagues, helped put the dye in what had become a dysfunctional relationship. In the process, I moved farther and farther away from what I was trained to do, to the point that I almost couldn’t recognize the doctor I had become.

This growing sense of alienation and disillusionment is widespread among doctors. A survey of physicians by the Massachusetts Medical Society back in 2003 revealed that less than 50 percent of physicians under the age of sixty, if given the chance to do it all again, would choose a career in medicine. Follow-up surveys since then have shown no change in that level of physician dissatisfaction. Workplace satisfaction is not the only issue, not even the biggest one. A national survey conducted in 2010 by Sermo, a large online physician network, documented physicians’ anger and frustration in greater depth. One startling result was that only one-fifth of doctors felt they could make clinical decisions based on what was best for the patient, rather than what insurance paid for. This feedback matters to all of us, because the reason that so many doctors, especially primary caregivers, are unhappy is closely related to the complicated ills of our current health care system. To understand one is to go a long way toward understanding the other.

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This growing sense of alienation and disillusionment is widespread among doctors. A survey of physicians by the Massachusetts Medical Society back in 2003 revealed that less than 50 percent of physicians under the age of sixty, if given the chance to do it all again, would choose a career in medicine. Follow-up surveys since then have shown no change in that level of physician dissatisfaction. Workplace satisfaction is not the only issue, not even the biggest one. A national survey conducted in 2010 by Sermo, a large online physician network, documented physicians’ anger and frustration in greater depth. One startling result was that only one-fifth of doctors felt they could make clinical decisions based on what was best for the patient, rather than what insurance paid for. This feedback matters to all of us, because the reason that so many doctors, especially primary caregivers, are unhappy is closely related to the complicated ills of our current health care system. To understand one is to go a long way toward understanding the other.

About the Author
Dr. Maggie Kozel graduated from Georgetown University School of Medicine in 1980 and went on to specialize in pediatrics, completing her residency at the Bethesda Naval Hospital. She served as a general medical officer on board the USS McKee and as a pediatrician at the US Naval Hospital in Yokosuka, Japan. Upon her return, she worked as a pediatrician in the active reserves at the US Naval Hospital in Bethesda. She also entered private practice first in Washington, DC, and then in Rhode Island. For ten years she was a pediatrician/partner at Narragansett Bay Pediatrics. A Fellow of the American Academy of Pediatrics, she left her practice after seventeen years, and currently teaches high school chemistry. She lives in Jamestown, RI, with her husband and daughters.
In Cooking Close to Home we hope to share not just our favorite recipes but our passion for finding and cooking fresh, local and seasonal foods. Finding fresh food is an adventure, and cooking seasonally requires some creativity as we adapt our recipes depending on the harvest. It also means some effort in planning and preparation, but the rewards are so satisfying. Our more than 150 recipes and Harvest Hints show you how to transition to buying foods that are simple, fresh and in season all year round. The recipes also highlight the unique varieties and flavors that are found locally and seasonally in the Northeast. Because eating fresh, unprocessed food simply means better nutrition, we share how to store the harvest when it is at its peak of freshness. These foods will nourish your heart and soul, all winter long.

There is no comparison to the satisfaction of coming home from the farmers’ market with a basket full of fresh, local foods. We encourage you to take every opportunity to be engaged with your food, whether it be shaking hands with a farmer at the market, or signing up for an entire season of fresh food through a farm share. Our food system is complicated and there is a lot to learn if we want to be conscious about what we eat. Learn about your food and how it was grown—is it organic, grass-fed, raised without hormones and antibiotics?

We believe that eating fresh and in season is essential to our health, to the prosperity and viability of our local farmers and to the sustainability of our planet. Cooking and eating fresh and seasonal foods that are grown by small producers in our own communities reduces our carbon footprint, broadens our appreciation and awareness of our local growers and encourages us to develop a culture of food that has been lost in many families. As you prepare and savor local foods you are building traditions for the next generation. We are certain that many of our recipes will become your family favorites in seasons to come.

The recipe below uses honeycrisp apples, which are one of Diane’s favorite varieties. Every year she visits her local orchard—there are several near her home in Colchester, all are family-run farms—at least once or twice to pick a few bushels.

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**Sweet Purple Slaw with Apples and Walnuts**

**Salad**
- 4 cups red cabbage, sliced (¼-inch by 1-inch long)
- 1 Honeycrisp apple, chopped ¼-inch, or 2 cups total
- ½ small red onion (or ¼ cup), chopped
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- ½ cup walnuts, chopped
- ¼ cup dried cranberries

**Dressing**
- ¹⁄₈ cup red wine vinegar
- ¼ cup olive oil
- ¹⁄₈ cup maple syrup
- ¹⁄₈ teaspoon salt
- ¹⁄₈ teaspoon fresh ground black pepper

Serves six to eight

- In a large bowl mix together the cabbage, apple, onion, lemon juice, walnuts and cranberries.
- Prepare the dressing by whisking together the vinegar, olive oil, maple syrup, salt and pepper.
- Add the dressing to the cabbage mixture and mix well to coat.
- Refrigerate at least 2 hours before serving.
T he response to the Tucson shootings by
the U.S. mainstream media and President
Obama are as glaring a demonstration of
exploitation and mass delusion in the service
of preserving the anachronistic myth of America
as you’ll find.

In the same week it was announced that our
illegal invasion of Iraq has resulted in more
than a million casualties, our nation spent
millions of words canonizing six murdered
Americans. When 10 children die every day
from gun violence in our country, we spent a
week engaged in masturbatory suffering over
the death of one child. What bon chance for
the media that the littlest victim was a white,
middle-class Christian child, given that the
other nine children that died that day were
most likely black, poor, and didn’t have profes-
sional portraiture at the ready. How equally
fortuitous that the shooter is bonkers! Far be
it from the mainstream media to call an
attempted political assassination “political.”

Katie Couric and Co. fell over themselves
putting on their big boy empathy pants in a
rush to rise above what they consider inconse-
quential items like the virtual hit Sarah Palin
put out on Giffords, Glenn Beck’s call to “put
a bullet in their head,” and Rush Limbaugh’s
idea to keep one liberal alive in a zoo just to
prove they once existed. The pantheon of the
winger elite has been begging for bloodshed
but the media cry, “No political story here!”

The MSM’s opportunistic exploitation of this
child, coupled with the public’s eagerness to get
dragged down into a warm, good-feeling place
of inculpable pure grief, is enough embarrass
the hell out of any adults in the room.

Enter Obama’s Panglossian stroke fest of
speech. “We should be willing to challenge
old assumptions in order to lessen the pros-
pects of violence in the future.” Either Obama
is referring only to the narrow category of
violence aimed at middle-class white people, or
the mounting body count in the Middle East,
our increasingly injurious prosecution of the
drug war, and our murder and torture of those
suspected of thought crimes against the U.S.
Empire, aren’t acts of violence but of “guid-
ance” or “tough love.”

The U.S. produces two-thirds of all the weap-
on earth and we dole out a great many as
“foreign aid,” so for Obama to opine to anyone
about violence warrants an all-time-high score
on the To Kill a Mockingbird “unmitigated
temerity” scale. “Let us be as good as she
thought we were,” he said, undoubtedly double-
timing it back to the White House to halt the
practices of indefinite detention, extraordinary
rendition, domestic warrantless spying, and
the persecution of whistle blowers. Next up,
was nothing more or less than a little girl and
her death no more or less tragic than that of
all the Middle Eastern little girls we’ve killed.

Obama is referring only to the narrow category
of violence aimed at middle-class white people, or
the mounting body count in the Middle East,
our increasingly injurious prosecution of the
drug war, and our murder and torture of those
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Empire, aren’t acts of violence but of “guid-
ance” or “tough love.”

The U.S. produces two-thirds of all the weap-
on earth and we dole out a great many as
“foreign aid,” so for Obama to opine to anyone
no more blowing up suspicious goat herders by
Predator joystick!

When Obama said “we are better than this” he was wrong. We are worse than this
comparatively trifling example of disrespect
for human life, because we kill at much greater
scale, with our sanity in hand and with massive
impunity. We kill to secure economic advan-
tage for corporations and to protect the posi-
tion of elites for as long as extend and pretend
will allow. When Obama crooned, “She saw all
this through the eyes of a child... I want our
democracy to be as good as she imagined it,”
what he really wants is for us to have an imagi-
ary democracy and to accept, with childlike
questioning faith, the legitimacy of the insti-
tutions that pretend to uphold it.

Our president took the fertile occasion of
a mass murder to tell America a bedtime story,
effectively stifling the impulse to contemplate
the real American trajectory. He told us that
contrary to how fundamentally divided we are,
we are still “first and foremost . . . Americans,”
and despite one side of the aisle having deserted
reality entirely and the other side being spine-
less sell-outs fiercely coveting the other side’s
schwag, and both sides being innately incapable
of challenging the status quo, we are still able
to solve the paradigm-crushing conundrums
we face as one nation. This magical thinking,
in addition to being immensely comforting, is
a bald-faced lie. Obama’s appeal to the diapha-
rous myth of our innately superior American-
ness is necessitated by the ethical and functional
bankruptcy of the American reality.

As the current arrangement collapses,
Liberty, Freedom, Unity, and Independence
will rush in with enough irony to choke a horse:
Liberty from the rule of law and public services,
Freedom from pensions and employment, and
Unity in hunger and chaos. We raise moist eyes
in hope to a media spectacle intended to prevent
us from engaging in a painful reckoning: that
we are ill-prepared for the real Independence
that our corporatized, centralized, stultified
government has made inevitable. •

Radical Sahin: Bedtime Stories—Reflections on Our Response to the
Arizona Shootings  Juliet Buck

When Obama said “we are better than this” he was wrong.
We are worse than this, because we kill at much greater scale,
with our sanity in hand and with massive impunity.
Energy Optimist, continued from page 18
read the household meters for each member every month, and then each member would have to be billed for their monthly kWh usage minus their share of the monthly power production from the wind/solar system. Then, after everyone has paid the monthly amount due to the group administrator, someone would have to pay the monthly total balance due to the power company.

result in one of two futures: either one in which electricity generation is radically decentralized and re-localized and the power company is left to manage and maintain the grid; or one in which the centralized monopolies continue to earn profits for their investors by controlling supply and demand on the backs of consumers.

Okay, let’s assume that enough people call their local legislators and get them to support the group-net-metering provisions in Klein’s bill. This is an outline of how the whole process would work, if it were set up properly:

A group of people who use the same power company find available land that is located near a power line operated by their power company.

For a 150kw solar installation (enough for 30 average homes to be fully powered by the sun) you’ll need about two acres of land, ideally with minimal east-west slope and unobstructed southern exposure near a three-phase power line.

A 100kw Community Wind Turbine from Northern Power requires a similar land area and can power a similar number of homes, but finding a site that has a good wind resource (average speeds of 14-plus miles per hour) that is already near a three-phase power line is more challenging than finding a good solar site.

It doesn’t matter where the group members live as long as they have the same power company.

Once the group finds a feasible location it can issue an RFI (request for information) to determine feasibility of the site, or it can issue an RFQ (request for qualifications) to pre-screen qualified local installers. An RFI or an RFQ helps you get more information and determine which local installers are qualified to help you.

Once you get enough feedback from local installers to know that your site is feasible, it’s time to finalize your LLC (limited-liability corporation) or a co-op and start soliciting your community for member-investors. The structure of the organization needs to enable people to transfer their income tax liabilities to the organization so that the project can leverage tax-credit incentives. But you should find a tax/business lawyer, and/or an accountant to be part of your group, because you’ll need the legal expertise during the organizational process. You may incur $500 to $2,500 in legal fees.

Then your group issues an RFP (request for proposals) to get qualified local installers to give you detailed project proposals.

The local installer handles most of the permitting, Public Service Board, grid-connection, and state-incentive paperwork.

Every month a software program (and a power meter on the installation), or an administrative person in your group, tracks how many kilowatt-hours were sent into the grid, and directs the power company how to distribute those credits to the group members.

The LLC/co-op should set aside some money (2 percent to 5 percent of annual power production value) into an escrow account for long-term maintenance. (Some turbine components need to be rebuilt in 10 to 20 years; solar inverters only last about 15 years.)

Members can sell/transfer their shares of the LLC/co-op (if they move, for example) to anyone else who uses the same power company.

Group net metering has a lot of potential in Vermont if we can get the regulations adjusted. Please call your local legislators and let them know this is important to you.

Off-site group net metering is important because less than half of home/office roofs are suitable for solar power, and wind turbines aren’t allowed by most residential and commercial zoning laws.

Because of this, so far the only examples of group net metering in Vermont are a couple of business owners who have combined their business/residential power bill, and one neighborhood association that has had ongoing billing and administrative headaches.

So much for landmark legislation.

Tony Klein, State Rep from Middlesex/East Montpelier, is chair of the House Natural Resources & Energy Committee, as well the chair of the Joint House & Senate Energy Oversight Committee. Klein tells us through my local Rep. Adam Greshin that he is well aware of the onerous limitations on the current group-net-metering regulations, and that he is hopeful this will be improved via H.156, a bill he intends to push this winter.

Because of this, so far the only examples of group net metering in Vermont are a couple of business owners who have combined their business/residential power bill, and one neighborhood association that has had ongoing billing and administrative headaches.

Further, a clear tension exists between a power company and any of its customers who wish to become power producers themselves and thus become partially independent. This tension can
I’ve never been in a social movement so frozen by citizen denial as the anti-wireless effort. Maybe, if I had been one of those “Ban the Bomb”/“Strontium-90 Kills” protesters back in the 1950s, I’d have more patience. They waited three long decades before the public burst through its post-World-War-II psychic numbing into heated uproar about the nuclear arms race – three decades of lost time, marked by secret bomb research, uranium mining, open-air nuclear testing, unfettered arms build-up, unreported accidents, casual waste disposal, corporate-driven grandstanding to sell the new enemy to the public – and, all the while, increasing cancers, leukemias, immunological disorders, and deaths.

The hardy individuals of the “Ban WiFi”/“Electromagnetic Radiation Kills” struggle are just as isolated as those brave picket-sign carriers of the ’50s. I know. I’m one of them, and I’ve endured my share of rebuffs, dismissals, eye rolling, and denials. Many, like me, have dedicated years to the risky social behavior of bringing up the issue, most particularly since the Telecommunications Act of 1996 (TA96) threw open the industry to uncontrolled proliferation via emissions bases like towers, satellites, and antennas; via consumer gadgets that fit into a dashboard, a pocket, or an ear.

Since long before TA96, though, scientists were adeptly researching the health effects of exposure to non-ionizing electromagnetic frequencies (EMFs). Despite the telecom industry’s boasts to the contrary, thousands of laboratory, medical, and epidemiological studies have revealed the mechanisms and extent of biological damage caused by EMFs.

After a lifetime of bio-electrical research, Dr. Robert O. Becker summed up with: “I have no doubt in my mind that, at the present time, the greatest polluting element in the earth’s environment is the proliferation of electromagnetic radiation.” And environmental health researcher Dr. Neil Cherry predicted that soon, due to EMF exposures, cancer will not occur at its 1900 level of one in 100, nor at its late-century level of one in four – but will erupt in each of as several times in a lifetime.

Meanwhile, since the first antennas went up, community organizers, anti-nuclear activists, telecom-industry renegades, medical professionals, the electro-sensitive, and elected officials have been mustering international initiatives and manifestos, making videos, writing articles, talking on the radio, and generally trying to alert the populace. Said populace, though, seems to have fallen head-over-heels for the toys hurled its way with no less purposeful manipulation than the disease-infested blankets doled out to Native peoples in the American West or the Christian fundamentalist language programs oil corporations set up for indigenous tribes throughout Latin America.

Enter: Full Signal

It is into this psychic glacier that Palestinian filmmaker Talal Jabari’s hour-long documentary arrives. Full Signal (www.fullsignalmovie.com) is the film to break the ice. Motivated by the birth of his daughter, Jabari set out to skate the thin financial ice of the independent documentarian to ensure a future for children. Previously, he had worked as a CBS associate producer, “60 Minutes” field producer, and Al Jazeera documentary-channel producer and, no stranger to controversy, in such hot spots as Israel, Nigeria, Guatemala, and Serbia.

For the making of Full Signal, Jabari visited 18 experts in 10 countries and six states in the U.S. Swedish medical researcher Professor Olle Johansson. Neurosurgeon Professor Leif Sanford. Public health physician Dr. David Carpenter. Biologist Dr. Zamin Shalita. Environmental scientist/policy analyst Dr. Louis Slesin. Former New York State Senator Whitney North Seymour, Srq. Science journalist B. Blake Levitt. And a number of other citizens of all stripes concerned about the effects of wireless technology on all of us.

He also speaks with sick people – those whose nervous and immunological systems have already broken down from the increasing barrage, who now live truncated lives inside shielded rooms and apartments.

The deal is: they are only the first. The more you are exposed, the more likely you are to become one of them.

Contemplate, too, your friends and family who – say, since 2003 or 2007 when EMF emissions became truly ubiquitous -- have suffered heart arrhythmias, strokes, and coronaries; cancers; nervous system disorders like M.S. and Parkinson’s; immune deterioration in increased allergies and susceptibilities to viruses and bacteria; psychological stresses like anxiety and depression; tinnitus, deafness, cataracts, dimming eyesight, and visual irregularities.

“...at the present time, the greatest polluting element in the earth’s environment is the proliferation of electromagnetic radiation.”
—Dr. Robert O. Becker, bio-electrical researcher

Full Signal’s interviewees make it as clear as crystal that – no matter what Verizon, Sprint, T-Mobile, and the Federal Communications Commission tell you – the EMFs blasting from your BlackBerry, home WiFi port, cordless phone, and laptop, not to mention the public antennas throwing ubiquitous waves to power up your GPS and iPad, can be as dangerous as the ionizing radiation from a nuclear bomb; they’re just slower acting.

But few know about this new “cold war.” One reason for the freeze in awareness is that, in mass
Free Vermont Media, continued from page 25

Technological society, social and psychological conundrums are typically “solved” by the technological fix—reliance on new inventions to address the problems caused by past inventions. They are also “solved” not by you and me in our backyards and town meetings, but by multinational corporations whose bottom line is to make profits, and military institutions whose bottom line is to protect the profit-making endeavor.

Without a cogent analysis of the techno-political dynamic that defines modern society, we citizen-consumers come to blindly champion the rootless march of invention called “progress,” foregoing such systemic questions as: What are these technologies really for? Who thinks them up, manufactures, advertises, and disseminates them? Why? Who ultimately benefits from them? And why is it that the telecommunications corporations took the cue from the nuclear industry—so recently barraged by lawsuits from sick and injured lab workers, atomic veterans, uranium miners, and downwinders—by formulating a TA96 that bans all protest based on health or environmental effects?

Banning the Bomb, Breaking the Ice

Before the December 2009 premier of Full Signal at the Santa Fe Film Festival, I could not have written these words with the same public backing I bring to them today. Employing thorough and engaging documentation, the film legitimizes both science and struggle. And by a miracle of timing, it captures the moment of an emerging, yet still pre-political awakening. Who could have guessed that in the city of Santa Fe, where the only activists were a small cadre of mostly ill, electro-sensitive citizens, the film would catalyze a stampede for tickets? Or that the post-screening question-and-answer period with Jabari would spontaneously mutate into a town hall strategy meeting that would snowball into a joint city-officials/activist effort?

Like a public meeting, the film introduces the viewer to some of the frustrations and successes of protest. Standing on a busy street corner, New York City Council member Peter Vallone, Jr., explains how, despite numerous attempts at legislation to stop unchecked placement of antennas in neighborhoods and inform citizens of the location of existing EMF sources, the tentacles of TA96 into municipal law prevented him from making headway.

Community activists in Brooklyn, though, successfully cornered T-Mobile into breaking a signed contract by uncovering the company’s dishonesty about the size of the antennas in question. And in the Arab village of Issifya, after rampant cancers clustered precisely around 70 antennas hidden behind trees and under the eaves of private homes, the villagers tore down towers with their own hands. Through sustained organizing, they were then able to convince contract holders to break their agreements, and the village is now antenna-free.

Throughout the film, the visual parade of images makes an indelible mark on the viewer: doctors and scientists speaking truth while standing under ugly metal towers; MRI scans of irradiated brains; towers and antennas (tall, squat, dressed up to look like pine trees, ensconced in church steeples); people everywhere, their ears glued to phones, fingers poking buttons, shouting out to no one, riding the illusion of “connectedness” in mass society.

Since its stunning premier in Santa Fe, Full Signal has been screened at the Environmental Film Festival in Washington D.C., Big Sky Documentary Film Festival in Missoula, Montana, Vilnius International Film Festival in Lithuania, Festival du Film de l’Environnement in Paris, and Asheville Food and Environment Film Festival. It was awarded Best Documentary at the Myrtle Beach International Film Festival, given the Award of Merit at the Accolade Competition, and won the Audience Award for Best Documentary at the Gasparilla International Film Festival in Tampa, Florida.

It has been screened in Abu Dhabi, Dubai; Newburgh, New York, Portland, Oregon, and on Capitol Hill in D.C., while a DVD in English, Spanish, French, Arabic, Italian, and Swedish is now available via www.fullsignalmovie.com.

The ice is breaking as this crucial addition to the effort synthesizes what its dedicated forebears have been working at, often alone and without resources, for some time. It is also breaking at a time when the industry and the FCC are clanking shut the last venues for democratic participation in siting and emission levels, forbidding protest on any basis whatsoever—and when a roll-out of EMFs-on-steroids, WiMAX, is slated to blanket the entire continent.

Please join in melting the psychic numbing surrounding this behemoth in our midst. For starters, seek out Full Signal. Let the talented Talal Jabari help you reflect on the radiation you are now being exposed to—and how it is, on the deepest level, you want to “reach out and touch” this precious thing called Life.
Bye Bye Miss American Empire: Secessionists of All Stripes

Bill Kauffman

Bill Kauffman, resident of New York state, is the author of Bye Bye Miss American Empire (Chelsea Green, 2010), a book that explores the unaffiliated secession movement in the U.S. With the author’s permission, Vermont Commons: Voices of Independence, has been publishing excerpts from the book focusing on Vermont’s participation and leadership in secession from the U.S. Here, we present our third installment from Kauffman’s book.

“Secession in the twenty-first century is not a racist plot,” says Vermont Commons publisher emeritus Ian Baldwin. “The myth of Lincoln,” he continues, “has erased secession from the consciousness of people in the North.” It is as if the Civil War settled for all time the question of whether a state might withdraw from the Union.

“This is not a North–South issue,” insists Walter Donald “Donnie” Kennedy, author of The South Was Right!, a popular work of Confederate apologetics. It is here that a Northerner like myself gets stuck in the briar patch, confounded by what the Drive-By Truckers call “the duality of the Southern thing.”

Most of the Southerners present at the Burlington conference (a national conference of secession organizations held in Burlington, Vermont, in November 2006, and referenced by Kauffman in previous installments of this series) were associated with the League of the South, which was founded in 1994 and seeks “to advance the cultural, social, economic, and political well being and independence of the Southern people by all honourable means.” (That English u in honourable is no misprint: The LOS disdains the Yankee lexicographer Noah Webster’s orthography.)

I know Southerners who were members of the league in its early years but later dropped out because they were “uncomfortable” with some others who had joined. The league has repudiated overt racists such as the ex-Klansman David Duke, but I’m told that it has attracted its share, or more, of racist assholes, and it has done a piss-poor job of attracting black members. Judge for yourself at www.dixienet.org.

The Northerners in Burlington are wary of the delegates from the land of cotton.

“What do you think these Southerners are up to?” Sale asks Naylor the night before the convention. “They’re coming to deal,” replies Naylor. The Southerners, he suggests, want legitimacy. Were they on tiptoes, not saying things that should have been said? Perhaps. Or maybe the stakes have become so high, the costs of empire so crushing — spiritually and socially as well as financially — that cultural differences just don’t matter anymore.

League director Franklin Sanders, a gold and silver dealer from Dogwood Mudhole, Tennessee, delivers an anti-corporate sermon that denounces Wal-Mart, McDonald’s, and the way that “local economies have been bleed dry by corporations.” He calls for a re-localization of the economy. He speaks with great hope of the home-school and whole-foods movements, of “local purchases with local money.”

I ask Sanders about the cultural differences between the Southerners, who in the straightjacket taxonomy of the age are “ultra-conservative,” and the “leftists” of New England.

“What you’re seeing graphically demonstrates the breakdown of the left–right distinction,” says Sanders. “What you’re seeing is the failure of American politics.”

Disputes with Washington, over matters from oil extraction to hunting, point to a larger truth: People ought not to be ruled by a capital thirty-four hundred miles away.

Alaskans want to be “masters in our home,” says Dexter Clark.

“We are about liberty and home rule,” adds Donnie Kennedy. “Let’s defeat the empire.” I tell Kennedy that I have heard rumors that he intends to run as a Southern Pride candidate in the 2008 Republican presidential primaries. He doesn’t deny it. The plan, he tells me as we walk the busy streets of human-scale Burlington, is to win a few delegates, unfurl the Confederate flag at the national convention, and get tossed out on their Dixie asses. It didn’t pan out. But I liked the rebel spirit of the thing, even though as a New York Democrat I pulled the lever for Obama (the anti-Hillary) in the primary and Ralph Nader in November.

Kirk Sale asks the Southerns, point-blank, if they condone racial discrimination.

“If you’re gonna be a racist, you can’t be for liberty,” replies Kennedy, but the best defense is always a good offense, and nothing so grates upon a proud Southerner as the rasp of New England sanctimony. “I haven’t seen but one black person since I’ve been here,” continues Kennedy, “so I won’t be lectured on race by Vermonters.”

Touché: The Green Mountain State has a minuscule (0.5 percent) black population. And dig this: The SNC believes to be on the verge of collapse, spoke of “holding hands together in harmony and friendship” with “our black brothers and sisters” in an independent South. The Southern secessionists tend to speak the language of Christianity, but then the tradition of Christian resistance to unjust or arbitrary power is in the same American grain as anarchistic abolitionists and lunch-counter sit-ins.

Look. Who can ever really know what is in another’s heart? The LOS likely contains some scoundrels and scumbags. But I do know this.

Forty-nine and fifty

To my mind, the strongest — irrefutable, really — case for secession from the United States belongs to those two most recent additions to the indivisible butadable union, Alaska and Hawaii.

Dexter Clark, a quinquagenarian gold miner and co-proprietor of “Mining Our Own Business,” is vice chairman of the Alaskan Independence Party, and boy does he look the part. Wisconsin native Clark, who plays Santa Claus in the sun-starved Alaskan December, came to Alaska in 1973 to work on the pipeline and “get rich quick.” He didn’t get rich but he stayed. He and his wife, Lynette, “Yukon Yonda,” live in Fox, 10 miles outside Fairbanks. He is the only delegate with clothes fastened by reindeer buttons.

Clark reaches into his pocket and fishes out five gold nuggets, one shaped like Pegasus. My daughter, then 12, is delighted; she has met a real Alaskan. At the conference, Clark recites a Robert Service poem (“Yellow”) about a man who watches another shoot a dog. In conversation, he quotes the unlikely duo of Mahatma Gandhi and Ayn Rand — but then incongruities, even mesalliances, pervade the weekend.

Like the other delegates, and like most Americans before the First World War, Clark thinks of himself as a citizen of his state and not
Bye Bye Miss American Empire, continued from page 27 of the USA! USA! “Name a country,” he says. “If I go there and they ask me where I’m from, I say, ‘Alaska.’ I see a smile. If I say ‘the United States,’ I get . . . the glare.”

“Statehood for Alaska and Hawai‘i had been an integral part of the Cold War,” wrote historian John S. Whitehead in Completing the Union (2004), his thorough account of the transformation of these two far-flung territories from “Cold War defense installations” into states 49 and 50. These territories were pawns in a geopolitical game, and after half a century of being pushed around the board, the pawns are restless.

Disputes with Washington, over matters from oil extraction to hunting, point to a larger truth: People ought not to be ruled by a capital 3,400 miles away. Alaskans want to be “masters in our home,” says Clark. In the late 1970s he attended a rally of Alaskans for Independence. The party’s history is as colorful as you would expect: Its founder, gold miner Joe Vogler, was murdered in 1993 under circumstances that remain contested. Ambitious lawyers seldom vie for the AIP gubernatorial nomination; typical was the 2006 ticket, which consisted of a native chief and a reindeer herder. In 2008 former AIP member Todd Palin’s wife ran for vice president of the United States, though Sarah shed the vestments of Alaskan independence as quickly as John McCain had shed his crippled first wife.

Statehood for Alaska and Hawaii never made sense in a republic: Their admission violated the contiguous integrity of the Lower 48. But the opposition to stitching stars 49 and 50 to Old Glory came only from a handful of Southern Democrats, Taft Republicans, and independent liberals. Representative Woodrow Jones (D-NC) raised the specter of empire: “If Hawaii is admitted, the next step will be Alaska, and after these will come Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Guam, Wake Island, and on down the line. Where is the line to be drawn? Where shall we stop? Shall we spread the American States over two or three continents? Have we learned nothing from the lessons of the old Roman Empire?”

Ku Ching, a native Hawaiian, speaks in Burlington on behalf of independence for the Aloha State. “We’re not for secession,” he says, “because we feel we were never in the United States.”

Queen Liliuokalani was deposed in 1893 by a U.S.-backed coup, and in 1898 the erstwhile Kingdom of Hawaii was annexed – illegally, contend the Hawaiian patriots, because it was by resolution rather than treaty. (Allow me to venerate my fellow Upstater, President Grover Cleveland, perhaps the most formidable anti-imperialist ever to occupy the White House. Cleveland said that he was “ashamed” of the subterfuge and shenanigans of the Hawaii-coveting presidents Benjamin Harrison and William McKinley.)

Hawaii became an exotic garrison of the aborning American Empire. Statehood came in 1959, and with it Jack Lord and many bad jokes about getting lei’d. Dreams of an independent Hawaii, it seemed, had sunk at Pearl Harbor. But a rejuvenescent independence movement centered in the native population gained momentum when in 1993 the U.S. Congress apologized for the theft of the islands a century earlier. (As Ku Ching speaks, a Southern delegate interjects, “They apologized but they didn’t give it back.”)

Deploring a colonial economy based on “militarism and tourism,” Ku Ching explains that Hawaiian patriots are “pro-peace, antiwar, and anti-violence.” They differ on the form of government that a free Hawaii might take: Some prefer a constitutional republic, others the restoration of a queen. But that is a decision best reserved for Hawaiians, not politicians five time zones distant.

Donnie Kennedy asks Ku Ching the question that he is no doubt asked daily himself: “How would people who do not look like you be treated” in an independent Hawaii?

Ku Ching replies, “The Hawaiian kingdom was never a racial kingdom. We welcomed people of all nations. ‘Aloha,’ the genuine kind, says that if you want to, you and I can be brothers.”

Amity: a horror to some, but not to these divisors.

Thomas Naylor suspects that the outposts of resource-rich Alaska and strategically located Hawaii are the last states Washington would ever let go. Give up oil and the Pacific? Not on your conscript son’s life!

Vermont, on the other hand, is so lacking in the sort of strategic assets that register with Serious Men that its absence, while slicing a piece off the American soul, would mean nothing to the bottom line. The dispatch of U.S. troops to fight another Battle of Bennington seems unlikely, and as for the effectiveness of U.S. economic sanctions on an independent Vermont, “Canada did not honor the anti-Cuba embargo and would not honor a Vermont embargo,” says Naylor. An independent Vermont, he believes, need be no more heavily armed than army-less Liechtenstein or Costa Rica. For legitimate defense needs, the Vermont Guard, freed of its “national” obligations in distant places, would suffice.
Transition Times: From Action to Planning in Vermont

Transition Town groups love to jump into projects with easily visible results. Last issue, I profiled Transition Town Putney, which created community gardens and a bustling farmers’ market in their first year.

Transition Town Montpelier’s first-year accomplishments included the first vegetable garden on a U.S. statehouse lawn in modern times.

Where do all of these fit into the strategy of the Transition project, “from oil dependence to community resilience”? Are they enough to Transition the community in a planned, participatory, democratic, and fun way before crises force less-pleasant adjustments? And what does the resilient community look like, anyway?

Transition Town Montpelier is hosting discussions to address these and many other questions in the framework of an Energy Descent Action Plan, or EDAP. Monthly meetings are just starting to define what the EDAP will look like.

Planning for an energy-scarce future with a good quality of life for all is at the heart of the Transition concept. Transition Towns were conceived through a quick and dirty EDAP exercise that Rob Hopkins led in a permaculture class in Kinsale, Ireland. The class took on the project of writing the EDAP for the town, so it came together quickly and with a lot less input from a wide range of town residents than is ideal for planning documents.

Hopkins took the Transition Town concept to Totnes, England, and started a process more deeply rooted in the community. He included the EDAP among the 12 ingredients of the Transition Town process when he wrote The Transition Handbook, but he put it last. And Transition Town Totnes co-founder Naresh Giangrande remarked, on a Vermont visit, that most Transition Towns prefer action to planning, so the EDAP process hasn’t started in them yet.

Vermont is no stranger to planning. The state requires cities and towns to develop master plans and update them every five years, and regional planning commissions develop similar documents. A key difference of the EDAP is just in the first two words, “Energy Descent.” The EDAP acknowledges up front that energy will be considerably more scarce and expensive in the relatively near future than it is now. As with other Transition projects, it is also done with the recognition that slowing and adapting to climate change will be a key challenge of the coming decades, and an expectation that the formal economy will continue unraveling.

In 2010, the city of Montpelier adopted a master plan that recognizes energy scarcity and climate change. The plan outlines ways the community can respond over the next 50 years to meet these challenges. The plan was a culmination of a three-year process, envision Montpelier, that involved hundreds in the community.

Montpelier’s 50-year perspective is much less urgent than the thinking behind the EDAP. In an early thought exercise, the Transition Town Montpelier EDAP group divided up into two groups to consider how to plan moving from producing 5 percent of Vermont’s food in-state to 80 percent. One group considered how to get there in 10 years, and the other one worked on an emergency, two-year transition to 80-percent food self-reliance. (The state’s new food strategy, developed in the Farm-to-Plate program, envisions growing 30 percent of our food in-state in 10 years.)

As with other Transition work, the emphasis in an EDAP is on the positive. Rob Hopkins encourages groups to write an EDAP that describes the future like a travel brochure for an attractive vacation destination, so people will want to do what it takes to go there.

Transition Town Totnes has recently published its EDAP. Transition Town Montpelier, together with other Transition activists from elsewhere in the state, is just starting to define what its EDAP will look like. It’s a sign of maturity in the state’s Transition movement that some people are pausing to develop this medium-term vision.

The EDAP for Transition Town Totnes (Transition in Action) can be purchased at locally owned, independent book stores or viewed online at totnesedap.org.uk. To join the Transition Town Montpelier EDAP group or find out about its upcoming activities, go to transitionvermont.ning.com/group/transitionvermontedapcommittee.

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Standing at the airport news stand, I see that Marc Zuckerberg, founder of Facebook, is TIME Magazine’s “Person of the Year,” while Forbes’ cover profiles Wikileaks’ founder Julian Assange – two faces of unfettered communication in the digital age. These men, along with Google, YouTube, Amazon, and Twitter, have deluged us with more information, entertainment, and interconnectedness than we can navigate. Facebook is the world’s largest country, with 500 million users (70 percent outside of the United States) playing games and sharing 30 billion pieces of content – posts, pictures and video – every month. Twitter reports 75 million users, and it would take more than 500 years to watch every video on YouTube!

Soon, through our mobile devices, we will be permanently connected to each other from any location on earth. This is great news for telecom companies and businesses – but can we use these tools to reclaim local community life and make change happen?

As we’ve heard from Tunisia and Egypt, the social networks (e.g. Facebook, Twitter) have enabled political organizers to be more nimble, enabling supporters to take rapid action from multiple locations, often outwitting the “authorities.” Recognizing this, the Egyptian government shut down the Internet completely for several days in January. But this did not stop the opposition from gaining momentum, or the world from finding out about it. Digital access can accelerate internal organizing and bypass government-controlled news outlets, but it is only one point of leverage in the larger struggle for democracy. Egypt’s revolution has been fueled by a long-simmering political opposition ignited by high food prices, scarce job prospects, and access to Al Jazeera broadcasts heralding Tunisia’s overthrow of Ben-Ali. Blogging, Twitter, and texting simply help to fan the flames.

Many select board, city council, and school board seats remain uncontested. Does that mean we are happy with the way our communities are running? Or are we just too busy with our daily struggles and our Facebook pages to participate?

Is there evidence that digital communications is having an impact on the quality of life or the political structure of Vermont? In this time of deep economic recession, we experience rising poverty rates, expensive health care, limited employment options, climate-change concerns, and a war with no end in sight. Pockets of opposition are muted in the public arena and have failed to join together to challenge the way things work. Even during this sanctioned period of political change – Town Meeting season – many select board, city council, and school board seats remain uncontested.

Does that mean we are happy with the way our communities are running? Or are we all just too busy with our daily struggles and our Facebook pages to participate as candidates, activists, and even voters? Maybe all of this connectivity is like the “soma” of the Brave New World – chaining us to our laptops and mobile phones, typing and texting away the hours of our days, diverting us from the real work of building communities, side by side and face to face.

If you have examples of how new (and even traditional) media are helping you to build community in a meaningful way or to mobilize your neighbors to change systems that are not working, we want to know. Write to me at Davitian@cctv.org and fill us in on your story.
Letters to the Editor, continued from page 3

UNCOMMON MEDIA COURAGE

Editor, Vermont Commons:

Although I have many disagreements with the Vermont secessionist movement, I must congratulate you on publishing Christopher Ketcham’s “The Empire’s New Clothes” (Vermont Commons; Winter 2011). It is the single most courageous act of journalism I have read in a decade.

The obsequious media continue to be the faithful eunuchs of the murderous oligarchs who rule us – and that includes every single newspaper in Vermont. Those poor misinformed bastards who still see Obama as “a step in the right direction” are to be pitied for their ignorance. Even Obama’s cruel proposal to cut in half LIHEAP (low income home energy program) will probably not shake them out of their stupor. As for the ongoing slaughter in the Middle East, tens of thousands of innocent men, women and children killed by drone attacks or half-crazed American troops – we at home bear responsibility; we are all Eichmanns!

And those of us who were overjoyed by Obama’s ascension to the imperial throne – overjoyed that a man of color had breached the racial barrier and, in our naivete, celebrated a new beginning, have to bow our heads in regret. Evo Morales, president of Bolivia, had the definitive word to say about Obama: Obama is trapped by capitalism and the structure of imperialism.

Once again, thanks for your courage – an attribute in an increasingly short supply in the “home of the brave and the land of the free.”

Al Salzman
Fairfield

ON COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE FRAUDS

Editor, Vermont Commons:

On Sunday morning, July 18, 2010, I woke up with a realization. The problems of the United States can be effectively solved by a new concept: counter-productive frauds (CPF). Once we finger the CPFs, we can address them, and solve them one by one.

CPF’s include some people, many institutions, and some manipulative processes employed to make people tolerate and/or support existing CPFs. The examples below will clarify what we are up against, and what we can do to rid us of CPFs. It is all well and good to fantasize that secession will makes us into North America’s Switzerland overnight. More likely, our political and related dregs of society will come with us and do their thing in the Second Vermont Republic – unless we debate, formulate, and establish principles and institutions, starting right now, to replace the fascist-capitalist rot in which these United States now wallow.

What can we do now to prevent the fascist-capitalist rot in the Second Vermont Republic that would be manipulated by the same CPFs now controlling the rapidly decaying U.S. Empire?

1) Institute a Vermont Tax forwarder in the Vermont Treasury, to collect all federal taxes and returns, and forward funds for those line items a Vermont voter referendum approves by majority.

2) Adopt a Vermont Fairness Doctrine to pool all campaign funds for each elective office and distribute it evenly so candidates will be elected on their ideas and motivation, not name recognition.

3) Adopt a single two-year term limit for all offices, so there will exist no professional career politicians who do everything for re-election and nothing for the people.

4) Start teaching pro se procedure in sixth grade so people can represent themselves when they become employees, homeowners/tenants, consumers, etc., and replace judges with justice by jury-only trials presided over by the foreperson. Judges and lawyers can be recycled to teach pro se procedure in high school.

5) Abolish all political parties and recruit legislators from jury pools volunteering for a single two-year term. After all, raising your hand for yay or nay on bills drafted by Legislative Council lawyers is a lot easier than judging evidence for a verdict, yet the jury system has functioned well for many centuries.

6) Start replacing capitalism with economic democracy. Consumer cooperatives are current examples, of where consumers, rather than corporatocrats, make policy. Other examples
can be found in a 436-page book by Carnoy and Shearer titled *Economic Democracy*.

(7) Provide initiative, recall and referendum.

Now, some examples of leading CPFs:

The **Nuclear Regulatory Commission** is a CPF: a tax-supported agency masquerading as a safety watchdog but explicitly charged with promoting nuclear power — a classic case of you-can't-serve-two-masters if there ever was one. Needless to say, all the facts are against the continued use and expansion of nuclear power: it is unsafe, uneconomical, unnecessary; unhealthy, and produces non-disposable waste which is a permanent danger to mankind and the biosphere. TIME magazine has collected motion pictures of "The Worst Nuclear Disasters," 10 accidents in all, covering 1957 through 1999, and I am trying to obtain permission from TIME to show this collection until there is an irresistible public demand to terminate nuclear energy construction and operation worldwide. In addition, NRC chairman Gregory Jaczko is an old nuclear promoter, instead of a foe and victim of the industry he regulates.

In Spain, all presidential appointments end automatically at the end of each presidency. Americans deserve no less. Jaczko was visiting Vermont Yankee on July 14, 2010, and refused to say when NRC would rule on VY’s license extension, let alone promise to close it on time. A VY-specific cure would be empowering the Vermont Public Service [Board] to issue certificates of public evil when so directed by the Vermont House and/or Senate, just as it now issues certificates of public good.

The **bankster and bankdit** fraud that has rocked the financial markets and institutions nationally and worldwide is another CPF. It is protected by John C. Dugan, a Bush W. holdover who believes that protecting the 1,500 federally chartered commercial banks and 50 foreign banks with U.S. operations is not the most important thing but the only thing. Unfortunately, he wears a "regulator" disguise and operates to protect all abuses and crimes perpetrated by banksters.

And as to the related "too big to fail" excuse for bail-outs, nature provides a perfect model to prevent such cancerous entities from arising: cell division. Living cells do not copulate; they divide to multiply. Do the same with corporations: when they reach an econometrically established size, they suddenly divide overnight. All employees with last name A to K become a new bank or other not-too-big-to-fail corporation, and employees L to Z become another. The problem with too-big-to-fail is they have too much political power. By spontaneous division, they are no longer a political problem.

The **American Association of Retired People** claims it is the lobby for 30 million seniors, and is legally a nonprofit, which means it pays no taxes on advertising and selling insurance, goods and services to a mature/handicapped market. But the main function is really the exact opposite: to prevent the formation of an effective 30-million strong senior lobby to insure adequate Social Security payments and universal health care for the nation.

The **Public Broadcasting Corporation** is another CPF with goodie-two-shoes features. It is the federally financed mouthpiece of the Bohemian Club or bohos who alone make all major U.S. policy in all fields. Meet them at http://tinyurl.com/4qnu3. Needless to say, all other mass media — print and broadcast — follow the same pattern of systematically deceiving the electorate.

To mask PBC’s real activity, they conduct interminable begging sieges and misrepresent the money as “public support.” They also mask their hypocritical ads by “thanking” business donors complete with the donors’ toll-free phone numbers. PBC also obeys the bohos’ political bull-stool line: “We are unable to include all minor party [read independent] candidates in debates ... It is VPR’s long-standing policy to carry political debates between the major party candidates [read demopublican professional career politicians re-elected by boho loot-financed name recognition ads] ... “Above all, VPR is concerned with presenting comprehensive, balanced, and fair radio programming.” VPR to me, April 9, 2010.

The **Two Major Parties** playing ping-pong and **election financing** are twin frauds, and insure that elections cannot be won, only bought from bribes by the deep pockets and protected by the Supreme Crock (formerly court).

Peter Moss
Fairfax
Perhaps Collapse: I Killed A Disabled Chicken  
Jasmine Lamb

I'm a romantic wannabe farmer with a love for doughy-eyed cows. So I was pretty thrilled to land myself a farm-sitting gig in Cabot this past August.

Before the farmers left they walked me around to introduce me to animals and gardens and show me the chores. As we moved the meat birds to new grass we came upon one of them looking lethargic. We brought her to the porch and put her in a box with food and water so I could keep an eye on her. I was also encouraged to stay tuned to the chrysalis hanging from a screen on the porch and be sure to eat any ripe raspberries in the garden.

This was heaven: chores and raspberries. And I was quite keen on my sick chicken. She seemed to only want to eat and drink from my hand while sitting on my lap. I was imagining this chicken's full recovery after a day or two of my doting care.

I commenced with the cows, watched the chrysalis progress toward butterfly, and continued to root for my chicken to miraculously resume walking, but by day five with no progress and watching her face-plant into her bedding and walking, but by day five with no progress and watching her face-plant into her bedding and food for the hundredth time as she attempted to maneuver, it dawned on me that something had to be done. Other folks were going to house sit for me and with this needy, paralyzed meat bird scheduled for slaughter in a month's time.

I'd never killed a chicken before, but now my time had come. I know for a lot of people in rural Vermont killing a chicken isn't a big deal, nothing to write home about – but for me this certainly felt like an occasion. I wasn't just proposing to kill any chicken, I was now going to kill the chicken that couldn't walk that I'd been hand feeding, petting, and holding on my lap all week.

I decided I'd wring her neck. I watched someone do it once, hold a chicken in his lap and twist the neck, and it looked – well – less alarming than one do it once, hold a chicken in his lap and twist the neck. Only whatever I did apparently didn't break her neck or do much of anything at all, since she just sat there looking like a very alive paralyzed twisted chicken. Damn, I couldn't do it again.

I sat the chicken on my lap (easy, since she couldn't walk and thought I was her protector and feeder), thanked her for her life, and wrung her neck. Only whatever I did apparently didn't break her neck or do much of anything at all, since she just sat there looking like a very alive paralyzed twisted chicken. Damn, I couldn't do it again. I hadn't fully contemplated the backup plan, but found myself laying her out on the board taking my knife and cutting off her head.

Holy cow! Did blood go in every direction. Now splattered with blood, headless chicken upside down in my hands flapping wildly, I was struck equally by my power and my death. "I killed this chicken. Now it is dead. Someday I'll be dead as well."

Impermanence was no longer hypothetical and I was no longer on the sidelines. I could see, all of a sudden, why the powers that want power for the sake of it would want to discourage people from slaughtering their own food – because at least for me it brought forward two radical realities that threaten corporate and state power. The first is that I don't need a middleman between my food and me. This isn't to say from now on I'm going to kill all the meat I eat, but it no longer is a condition or a necessity that someone else does the hard work.

And even more radical than realizing increased self-sufficiency, was my deep sense of my own death as something not theoretical, but as a fact: a fact that could arrive at any moment. I'm as transient as the next living thing, which means, with this definite sense of positive hopelessness, I don't need to be protected from the truth or protect others from it. I can live it up, say what is on my mind, stand on the earth and love her, say YES to food and farms and family, and risk my head being chopped off. My sense of personal power in the face of complete, utter, essential powerlessness – in the face of death – just expanded in all directions.

The next day I went to town and picked up my city-boy cousin and brought him out to the farm. That morning I'd coated the chicken parts in a spicy rub and left them to sit all day marinating. That night after chores we grilled the chicken and corn-on-the-cob on the outside fire pit. We made cucumber onion salad and steamed broccoli and laid out slices of ripe tomatoes. We drank beer and sat in the sun and let the smoke from the fire soak into our clothes and skin. We ate that food as if food had just been discovered, as if we'd never eaten before and never would again, as if this food was what our whole lives had been preparing us for. I couldn't contain my joy and yet couldn't find words for the experience and so I just sat there moaning in earthly delight, salt and butter and chicken and tomato juice dripping down my chin and fingers.

I'm making this all sound like a more romantic deal that it was. I killed a chicken and I ate it. If I hadn't done it someone else would have. But in the process I reclaimed a birthright I didn't know I'd lost: to hold life in my hands, to eat death for dinner, and to take responsibility for everything in between.

Splattered with blood, headless chicken in my hands

flapping wildly, I was struck equally by my power and my death.

“I killed this chicken. Someday I’ll be dead as well.”

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As an editor at large, I get to be considerably at large and so I am in fact living these days across the Cooper River from Charleston, South Carolina. That was the place, as you may remember, where the phenomenon erroneously called the “Civil War” began some 150 years ago, and where some folks now are determined to remember what went on and some others are determined to protest whatever went on then and is going on now.

It seems to have become something of a national issue, and being in a good position to take a look at the events this spring commemorating the sesquicentennial of what they like to call “the late unpleasantness,” I thought I’d try to shed a little light amid the considerable murkiness of ignorance all around.

But first I think it’s important to remember that the secession that took place 150 years ago was in a grand old American tradition. The American “Revolution” was, in fact, a war of secession – 13 colonies breaking away from the British Empire – not a war of conquest, and most of the Founding Fathers understood that to be a given right when they created the Articles and then the Constitution. The creation of the Republic of Vermont in 1777 was another act of secession, from both New Hampshire and New York. And just 25 years after the new nation was born, representatives from all New England states (only one from Vermont) met at a convention in Hartford to consider secession from the United States if their grievances against President Madison’s conduct of the war of 1812 and limitations on Atlantic trade were not satisfied; in the event, they did not vote for secession, but its spirit was in the air.

The American “Revolution” was, in fact, a war of secession –

13 colonies breaking away from the British Empire.

The creation of the Republic of Vermont in 1777 was another act of secession, from both New Hampshire and New York.

So in that context, let’s make clear that what began 150 years ago this April was not a true civil war, except in the sense that there were two sides in one country, because there was no attempt by one side to take over the other, as in the more familiar English civil war between Parliament and Charles I. The South did not want to run the Union, it wanted out of the Union. That makes it a war of secession (similar to the war of 1775-1783) or, as various forms have it, the War of Southern Secession, the War Between the States, the War of Northern Aggression, or the War to Prevent Southern Independence – all more accurate than “Civil War.”

Next, let’s see who really began it. The first conflict had to do with Washington’s unwillingness to give up federal forts and bases in states that had declared their independence, or even to negotiate some kind of settlement. After declaring independence in December 1860, South Carolina sent two delegations to Washington with the express purpose of working out terms, including monetary compensation, for the turning over of federal outposts in Charleston Harbor, including Fort Sumter. Refusing to negotiate, President Buchanan in January sent ships with 200 troops intending to restock and reinforce Fort Sumter, an island only four
miles from downtown Charleston. The first one was fired on and forced to turn back, and the South looked for some reconciliation. But when Lincoln took office two months later he still refused to negotiate and, a month after saying he had no intention of invading the South, accomplished that in effect by ordering a second flotilla of armed supply ships to force its way into the harbor.

Upon learning of the second fleet, in what seemed a clear and deliberate act of war, the government of South Carolina repeatedly demanded that the Unionists in the fort surrender. When they refused, the Carolina battalions gave warning on April 12, and after an hour began firing. The fort, low on munitions as well as provisions, finally surrendered the next day, the soldiers were transported by Confederate steamers to Union ships outside the harbor, and the only casualties were two Union soldiers that blew themselves up by accident during a cannon salute during the lowering of the U.S. flag.

Exactly what Lincoln wanted. It mattered not who commenced the first act of war, which was the North, but who fired the first shot; that would work in the Union propaganda machines sufficiently to have it understood not only in the North but in the Border States and territories that the South had started the war. A Union invasion of a revolutionary Confederacy that fired first seemed only a fit and proper response. Which in turn brings up the next nettlesome issue that always surrounds this issue: slavery, and the motive for Northern invasion.

In fact, after the fall of Fort Sumter the Union armies descended on the South in 1861, or tried to, in order to put down what Lincoln held to be a revolution by a federation of states that had illegally left the federal compact. They did not, nor would their generals or soldiers have even so formulated it, invade the South to eliminate slavery, in the cause of abolition, or for the liberation of Negroes. It was not formally or informally, in the minds of either the Union armies or their civilian instigators, a war about slavery.

The great myth that the Union was fighting for a high moral cause, the elimination of chattel slavery and freedom for four million oppressed people torn from Africa, was ultimately a very convenient falsehood that served Northern ends later on in the war, particularly in distorting world opinion so that neither England nor France, though they might have had some allegiance to the cause of independence, were able to take the side of the Confederacy. But even then, the ultimate welfare of black Americans and their peaceful economic and social integration into white American society was never, but to a tiny few – and certainly not to Lincoln or his government – a moral (or even political) principle even thought much less expressed. The deep racism of the American North, though the victors would try to go on to forget it, was as dark a stigma against the Union as anything it would project on the South.

And the Emancipation Proclamation? Well, in the first place, it had nothing to do with slavery, per se. It did not abolish slavery. It decreed that slaves in the Confederacy only were to be free, but not those elsewhere in the Union or the territories (Delaware, Maryland, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Missouri all had slavery, as well as Washington, D.C., until 1862). It was at bottom a military ploy, hoping to create rebellion and civil unrest on the South’s plantations at a time when the war was not going well for the Union.

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An annual $100 co-op membership earns you:

- A “Freedom and Unity” 50 Clover silver token (one ounce of .999 fine silver), featuring the Vermont independence flag on the front, and the likeness of Vermont homesteader and political activist Scott Nearing on the back.

- A one year subscription (6 issues) to Vermont Commons: Voices of Independence news journal.

- A Vermont Republic commemorative passport, featuring an 18th century woodcut image of an original Vermont republic coin on the front, and the Vermont independence flag on the back.

- A FREE 100 character classified advertisement in each of six issues of Vermont Commons: Voices of Independence news journal.

- An invitation to participate in our 2011 Commons Cooperative holiday meeting and party.

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Free Vermont, and long live the UNtied States.