A Scorpion by Any Other Name: The Military/Industrial Complex in Vermont

Peggy Luhr

The Scorpion and the Frog
A scorpion and a frog meet on the bank of a stream and the scorpion asks the frog to carry him across on its back. The frog asks, “How do I know you won’t sting me?” The scorpion says, “Because if I do, I will die too.”

The frog is satisfied, and they set out, but in midstream, the scorpion stings the frog. The frog feels the onset of paralysis and starts to sink, knowing they both will drown, but has just enough time to gasp “Why?”

Replies the scorpion: “It’s my nature...”

Vermont is being invaded by the military/industrial/energy complex. Our liberal and Progressive politicians are opening the doors for them in the name of solving our energy problems and climate crisis. The Chamber of Commerce and Senator Leahy want them here to provide jobs.

In reality, military contractors like Lockheed Martin are progenitors of the environmental crisis. They are the creators of the Silent Spring and the possibility of nuclear winter. Today they continue to peddle pesticides and push nuclear power. Why would Vermont, which prides itself on its environment and the purity of Vermont agriculture, want to pollute itself with Lockheed Martin’s greenwash? The residue will foul Vermont’s image and reality forever. Yet Burlington Mayor Bob Kiss is proposing to work with Lockheed Martin as part of the Carbon War Room, ostensibly to ameliorate global warming, even as Lockheed lobbies against any legislation to address climate change. Kiss is going forward with this plan without public input, despite a City Council directive to keep citizens informed.

Another contract is the UVM/Sandia National Laboratories contract to develop the “smart” grid. Sandia is the nuclear division of Lockheed Martin. Lockheed is creeping into Burlington’s ele...
Editorial

Vermont Independence: Open Sourcing the Green Mountain Revolution

Six years ago this coming November, a tiny band of Vermonters sitting around a central Vermont pub hatched an idea for what became the U.S. of Empire’s only statewide independent newspaper: Vermont Commons: Voices of Independence.

We launched the first issue of Vermont Commons in April 2005 – 12 pages in length, with a few advertisements from supportive local neighbors, and a focus on a simple three-part proposition:

#1. We believe that the United States is no longer a republic governed by its citizens, but an empire that is immoral and essentially ungovernable. The “endless war on terror” being waged by the United States of Empire for geo-strategic control of the world’s remaining fossil fuel energy resources – “full spectrum dominance” – cannot and will not alter the emergent 21st century realities of peak oil and climate change.

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

#3. We believe that a 21st century Vermont, working in concert with our neighbors and the rest of the world, may ultimately better be able to feed, power, educate and care for its citizens as an independent 21st century commonwealth or republic than as one of 50 states within the U.S. of Empire.

More than five years and 44 issues later, we have grown our statewide independent newsjournal into a bi-monthly “10,000 copies distributed to 350 locations all over Vermont” enterprise. Along the way, we have worked hard to capture some of the very best thinking and writing from a whole host of Vermonters (and beyond) about the critical issues of this unique time in world (and Vermont) history, with a focus on fuel, finance, food, governance, and the radical nature of Vermont’s “Freedom and Unity” experiment. We sought to continually remind our neighbors that, of all 50 states, only Vermont originally constituted itself as an independent republic (1777-1791) not just in name, but in action, and could, in the 21st century, do so again.

When we began our print newspaper in 2005, supported by a web site ably co-designed with FigRig’s Carter Stowell in his Montpelier office, the Web 2.0 revolution was just beginning. YouTube came online that same year, Facebook exploded onto the scene shortly thereafter, and Twitter was but a twinkle in Biz Stone’s eye. And now, as the Web 2.0 revolution emerges full flower – the 21st century world of the personal, participatory, networked web – Vermont Commons is positioning itself to take full advantage of this unique opportunity to “open source” the emerging nonviolent independence movement here in the Green Mountains.

We have not been idle these past five years on the Web 2.0 front. Our Vermont Commons YouTube channel features 100 videos, with the most popular of them receiving thousands of views. Our Twitter network, meanwhile boasts 2,000 followers, while our Facebook page and presence continues growing slowly and steadily.

And, after more than five years in print, Vermont Commons is at a crossroads.

As we approach the end of 2011, our editorial board recognizes that we must take full advantage of the new Web 2.0 revolution, so we have decided on a three-pronged strategy to best move the news journal and the conversation about Vermont independence forward.

First, to fully engage in a statewide and a global conversation about Vermont independence, we have decided to invest our limited financial resources in a new Drupal 7.0 open source web platform – to be formally launched by holidays continued on page 13

Contributors

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

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.

Marc Estrin is a novelist from Burlington.

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

David Garten is a photographer based in the Mad River Valley.

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

Greg Guma is a journalist, novelist and longtime citizen activist residing in Burlington.

Jim Hogue is a farmer and actor who lives in Calais.

Bill Kaufman, 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.

John Lazenby is a former managing editor of Vermont Life magazine, a journalist, and a photographer whose work has appeared in Vermont Life, the Christian Science Monitor, and The New York Times among other places. He lives in Montpelier.

Peggy Luhrs is a feminist and an ecological and peace activist who taught for a decade at the Institute for Social Ecology. She is a former coordinator for the Burlington Women’s Council, and has designed and built three passive solar houses.

Ron Miller is the author of a variety of books about alternative education and the owner of Shiretown Bookstore in Woodstock.

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.

Jonathan Stevens is an attorney who has practiced law in Vermont since 1980. His office is located in Burlington. In addition to a conventional law practice, he also advises people who wish to represent themselves. His website is www.proselegalservices.com.

Rob Williams, editor and publisher of Vermont Commons: Voices of Independence, is a teacher, historian, writer, musician, and yak farmer living in the Mad River Valley.
Letters to the Editor

PROPOSING A VERMONT VET SCHOOL

Editor, Vermont Commons:

I wanted to thank you about [the suggestion in Vermont Commons] that a Bank of Vermont should be established, and ask that you continue to communicate this message as much as possible. My fiancé and I are future physicians/veterinarians and intend to locate to Vermont. A big part of this decision has to do with Vermont’s collective intelligence and insistence on tending to matters that affect Vermonters (rather than bankers and corporate goons) in a democratic manner. Keep up the great work!

I am a veterinary student at Tufts University, and intend to locate to Vermont upon graduating to practice farm animal medicine. My fiancé is a medical school student at UMass Medical. She, too, looks forward to locating to Vermont to practice medicine. The recent passage of Vermont’s [healthcare-reform bill], and end-of-life legislation (which many Vermont physicians rightfully supported and is a real testament to Vermont’s position as an ardently pro-democracy state) have convinced her that Vermont is a terrific place to live. I want to debate how this decision has to do with Vermont’s collective intelligence and insistence on tending to matters that affect Vermonters (rather than bankers and corporate goons) in a democratic manner. Keep up the great work!

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Iwon’t explain my agreement with nearly all of your political positions, but I wanted to suggest that Vermont would do well to found its own veterinary school (my opinion). I think that the University of Vermont has a strong reputation as a veterinary medicine. The recent passage of Vermont’s [healthcare-reform bill], and end-of-life legislation (which many Vermont physicians rightfully supported and is a real testament to Vermont’s position as an ardently pro-democracy state) have convinced her that Vermont is a terrific place to practice medicine, and to live life sanely.

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In addition, Vermont will need its own vet school to sustain itself. Clearly, there will be some excess capacity; Vermont students would not fill all of the allotted seats. That highlights a
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The engine of the U.S. economy now is the military and control, and systems-of-systems integration. Both contribute technically proven, market-ready products prepared for integration.

Those meters will go in Vermont homes and emit RF radiation, implicated in causing cancer for cell phone users.

Mr. Kiss’s explanation for bringing in Lockheed despite its record of fraudulence in contracting, is that climate change is very important, and he perversely co-opts the slogan of the healthcare movement: “everybody in, nobody out.” This pat answer suggests a lack of knowledge of climate issues and patronizes his critics who are, at least equally, concerned about global warming.

Kiss is not alone in his ignorance of the military contributions to the environmental crisis. Even some environmental groups will not talk about the military despite a fairly common knowledge that they are the greatest polluters on earth, who fight wars for fossil fuels using stratospheric amounts of such projects. Chemicals developed for war are turned to agricultural use. DDT came out of the Pacific at rates of seven tons per hour. As I write, radioactive water is being poured into the oceans. We are in change-or-die territory now. We don’t need to get real about human survival. The earth is so loused up we can’t rely on solutions based on the cost to people or planet. We must use cocked-up and coked-up solutions to pan out. Local contractors and decentralized solutions create more decent work.

We are in change-or-die territory now. We don’t have time for Carbon War Room fantasies. We need to get real about human survival. The earth is being despoiled, the soil is being destroyed with these military byproducts.

LockMar is also in the security/ surveillance industry, with a new billion-dollar contract with the FBI for biometric implants. Haven’t those industries brought good things to life? Don’t you bet our D.C. Masters of the Universe are dying to know why Vermont is so stubbornly progressive despite much of the rest of the country getting

There are now several groupings, including the pragmatists, such as [Virgin Airlines owner Sir Richard] Branson [a founder of The Carbon War Room], [Bjorn] Lomborg [of the Copenhagen Consensus Center], and the American Enterprise Institute, which argue that geo-engineering is faster and cheaper than carbon taxes and emissions reductions, so just get on with it; and the theorists, such as the Royal Society and the Carnegie Institution for Science in the US which say we must have an emergency Plan B because we are heading for a certain climate catastrophe; meanwhile, businesses such as the Ocean Fertilization Company and the Biochar Initiative see dollars.

Lockheed manufactures weapons of mass destruction, enabling the oligarchy to make a financial killing. The ecological problems we face are the result of our disturbed relationship to nature. Nowhere is it more disturbed than within our military/industrial complex.

Military contractors are about conquering nature. These technological “geniuses” see themselves shaping nature for their ends. And they have shaped nature in the worst way by poisoning rivers, killing large sections of the oceans, fouling the air and soil, and ripping a hole in ozone layer. As I write, radioactive water is being poured into the Pacific at rates of seven tons per hour.

The 20th century is the story of war and industry becoming ever more connected in their extermination of humans, plant and insect pests, and the resulting dehumanization brought about by such projects. Chemicals developed for war are turned to agricultural use. DDT came out of World War II; Monsanto’s Agent Orange – used to defoliate Vietnam, altered to be less toxic – became 24D, your handy pesticide. Ecocide and genocide work hand in hand. Weapons of war become consumer products. The military wages war on nature along with the ever-changing but generally brown-skinned, enemy.

The engine of the U.S. economy now is the defense/war industry. In intervals between wars, when all the whiz-bang inventions for death might stay idle, the Masters of War reconfigure their product. Bomb technology is fused with the “peaceful atom.” Sandia’s diagram of its smart grid shows nuclear power and oil refineries linked to windmills and a solar house. Sandia wants to make sure these links stay in our grid. These folks gave us MAD (Mutually Assured Destruction) and they still seem hell-bent on that in one form or another. GE brought depleted uranium (DU) to Iraq. Now it’s peddled to irradiate food for longer shelf life. DU with your potatoes, ma’am?

Whole – not wholly owned

Why are so-called Progressives opening Vermont to these predators? In lieu of minds that think ecologically about whole systems, we would get experts in separation and specialization. Around the world people are trying to rid themselves of U.S. bases and the contamination they leave behind. F-16s in South Burlington are responsible for ground water contamination there. This is the Lockheed legacy.

Climate chaos is a result of ignorance about our impact on nature, and an economics that externalizes the costs of pollution and has a cancer-like ethic of growth. Our insane energy policies exist because those who profit from them buy our government so they can stay in business no matter the cost to people or planet.

We need people who understand whole systems – ecologists and ecological economists, biologists who know how to remediate damaged ecosystems. There are Vermonters who have done this work, these studies, who have taught others, and they have acolytes who will be the lights of the next generation.

Lockheed is antithetical to the mindset needed to resolve our predicament. Working with Branson, rich playboy, whose other project is consumer space travel, LM developed the Carbon War Room. The name encapsulates its conflict-driven paradigm. These corporations sell us their lethal services at exorbitant prices by pushing fear, a paralytic of critical thinking. Gwynne Dyer and others argue for a techno-fix to correct things. Summed up, the argument is: The earth is so loused up we can’t rely on solutions based on working with nature; we’vecocked it up so bad we must use cocked-up and coked-up solutions to fix it.

Clearly, calling the whole thing off won’t be easy. Far better to avoid this unhealthy relationship before the battering begins. The claim that these industries bring more jobs never seems to pan out. Local contractors and decentralized solutions create more decent work.

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9/11: Ten Years In, continued from page 1

a most-problematic “fact” – the “official story” of 9/11, 19 Arab hijackers with box cutters, etc. Absolutely every one of the major and minor elements of this tale has been shown to be inconsistent with demonstrable physical events and surrounded with impossible and suspicious behavior.

After 10 years of study, thousands of serious researchers in many technical areas can confidently assert the complete falsity of the “official story,” along with slightly differing alternatives – diffuse along the edges but solidly agreeing at the core: The “official story” is completely impossible, and a new, independent, subpoena-empowered investigation must be conducted to examine the contradictions and answer the questions raised by 9/11 truth groups: Architects and Engineers for 9/11 Truth, Medical Professionals for..., Scholars for..., Physicists for..., Intelligence Professionals for..., Firefighters for..., Pilots for..., Political Leaders for..., Lawyers for..., Religious Leaders for..., Media Professionals for...

These are not “tin hats,” “conspiracy nuts,” or “crackpots,” as culturally labeled. Google any of their web sites, and see the facts and discussions enabled by their collective expertise. Vast amounts of material have been available online since the first explorations and organizations debuted eight or nine years ago.

And yet the same, tired, much-wounded story continues to justify the exercise of our killing machines, military and financial, around the globe – including here at home, where our own population is being starved of humane goods and services.

The 9/11/justified “war on terror” (by whatever fancy name Obama chooses to call it) remains the be-all and end-all of our secure existence – all action based on a set of demonstrable, manipulated falsities. The media have enshrined the official story; any challenge to it – at least in this country – is off the table of the public mind.

Progress in research
The earliest researchers simply noted the contradictions of story and fact:

- Plane crashes leave wreckage. The one at the Pentagon left only a few scraps, none related to a 757.
- The initial hole in the outer wall of the Pentagon was not large enough to accommodate a 757; the grass leading up to the wall was unscathed; windows were unbroken, and although the official story has the wreckage “vaporizing” because of the extreme heat (including the titanium steel engines that burn the fuel), neighboring rooms contained wooden desks and paper books – unvaporized.
- Steel-frame buildings had never before collapsed from fires burning much more fiercely and longer than those in the twin towers. The collapses were at free-fall speed, demonstrating the removal of all supporting structures.
- Building Seven, a 47-story office block, collapsed in the late afternoon without being hit by planes or demonstrating significant fires.
- There were no bodies and no wreckage at all found at the purported site of the “Let’s roll” heroic self-sacrifice crash of the Shanksville plane.
- Cell phone calls describing the now-mythic events on board the hijacked airliners were not possible in 2001.

Beyond these prima facie physical contradictions, quickly and easily noticed by any open eyes were a host of behavioral oddities:

- the apparent stand-down of the NORAD air defense system, charged with scrambling fighters and protecting U.S. air space.
- the scrubbing of initial reports on all TV networks concerning explosions and demolitions.
- the odd behavior of the president and the secret service at a grade school.
- the immediate FBI confiscation of all videotapes from cameras inside and outside the Pentagon.
- the BBC news report, 20 minutes before it happened, of the collapse of Building Seven.
- the prompt, illegal removal of all evidence from the crime scenes.
- the flight-training history of the purported hijackers.
- the resistance of the Bush Administration to an official investigation.
- the hand-holding secret testimony of Bush and Cheney concerning the events of that day.
- finally, the appointment of an investigatory commission run by an administration insider who chose what evidence would be presented and what excluded from the official report.

In The New Pearl Harbor (2004), David Ray Griffin listed the contradictions, and considered the implication that our own government was complicit in the events of 9/11, and not a mere victim – either of intelligence failures or incompetence. In a nuanced discussion of complicity, Griffin distinguished eight possible levels, from simply lying about events to maximize political effects, through intentionally allowing expected attacks, to actual involvement in planning them. At the time he did not make specific accusations, or even hypothesize continued on page 6

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Our real treasures
What we really need is a new way of living, a science without the arrogance and irrational exuberance that seems to be in the genes of these guys and their financiers on Wall Street. We desperately need a world where the participation of women in the public sphere is deemed as important as that of men, since the abuse of women in the public sphere is deemed so vital.

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Part of the needed change is local interdependence:

- Behemoths like Lockheed bring all the worst of the system we must leave behind. We need people with an ecological vision. Mayor Kiss, Sen. Sanders, BED, UVM, and other Lockheed supporters are wearing blinders with dollar signs on them, and that is how we got into this fix in the first place.

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People just won’t “go there.” What an enormous, pervasive need-not-to-know.

expertise to the problems. Structural forces, melting points, evidence of explosives, aerodynamics, photo and video forensics, witness testimonies, and many other angles were explored in detail, and all information made public online at the various sites. But 10 years and many Bush/Obamaogenic catastrophes later, people still refuse to confront the ever more abundant evidence.

Let’s take only the single most obvious strange-ness: Building Seven collapsing without planes or significant fires. Curious? But somehow not so curious as to arouse curiosity. You’d think folks might get the hint that something was up.

However, talking with many news-aware friends over the years, I’ve found that very few had even heard of Building Seven. When I mentioned it was a classical example of a controlled demolition, I would almost always get exactly the same response: 

Gesture: Elbows bent, both hands up to shoulder level, palms out. Followed by

Sentence: “I’m not going there.” One woman added, “I don’t want to live in a world where such a thing is possible.”

Any further talk of details got those hands moving, flapping outward from the shoulders. Go away, “I really don’t want to go there.”

All those who have put many hours into reading books and scholarly papers, exploring photos and videos? Guess what... They’re all – all – nuts,

letters, continued from page 3

sustainable opportunity: Vermont would provide world-class veterinary medical education at an affordable price to students from other states, or even to international students.

[Also], I take an intense interest in politics. Vermont is an incredibly welcoming place. Very down-to-earth, and just plain ol’ sane! I hope to participate in local politics, and it’s refreshing to see that vibrant ideas (like yours) are being seriously considered.

As a final btw: the biomass heating concept is terrific! I’m spending my summer working on an organic farm in Concord, Massachusetts. I mentioned to my boss that since so much animal manure gets composted, creating a cheap copper-piping system would help capture the thermal energy created by the microbial flora present in massive compost piles. In many places, this would permit extended-season agriculture and would improve plant agriculture. So I’m totally with you on this concept, and the science/engineering are rock-solid as well.

Darryn Remillard
Tufts University

TAKING ISSUE WITH THE SVR FLAG

Editor, Vermont Commons:

Your principles are spot on (in my opinion). Your flag however, is not. 1, and many others, have searched long and hard for historical evidence to substantiate the claim that the flag you call the flag of the first republic, or Green Mountain Boys flag, has any ties to Vermont. The truth is, no such evidence exists.

What we do know is that the fragment that is housed in Bennington is, as the evidence supports, in fact the regimental colors of General John Stark, who commanded the New Hampshire troops at the Battle of Bennington. He did not have any command over the Green Mountain Boys, who were also present at the Battle of Bennington. As history shows, the boys were unruly and submitted to no one but their own commanders. To assert the claim that merely by their [similarity] the flag must be that of the Green Mountain Boys is flimsy at best. I refer any interested party to one of North America’s foremost vexillologists, Dave Martucci, and his exemplary work and article published in the December 2008 New England Journal of Vexillology entitled “Information and Misinformation.”

To disregard these facts is like disregarding a medical professional’s diagnosis. No amount of will can change the fact that the evidence does not support what is called “The Green Mountain Boys Flag” as even a factual reconstruction of a historical flag.

We all know the U.S. government disregards facts left and right. Will the SVR continue to do the same?

Greg Stone
Bradford
Bill Moyers has called Jeff Chester the “Paul Revere” of the media-reform movement. A former investigative reporter and filmmaker, Chester has been engaged in public-interest policy advocacy for more than three decades. In the 1980s he helped direct the successful campaign to establish the Independent Television Service (ITVS) for public TV. In the 1990s, he co-founded the Center for Media Education, spearheading an effort that led to passage of the 1998 Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) and rules requiring children’s educational programming for broadcasting. He is the executive director of the Center for Digital Democracy (CDD) based in Washington, D.C. CDD’s mission is to foster democratic expression and consumer protection in the digital-media era. His book, Digital Destiny: New Media and the Future of Democracy, provides an in-depth examination of the threats to the public interest from both old and new media consolidation.

Jeff is making a special trip to Vermont on September 22 to update us about the invisible and dramatic changes that will transform how all Americans (and many around the world) receive their news, information, and entertainment. Join us (and bring your friends) to find out how the growing interactive marketing apparatus uses our personal profiles and preferences to sell us financial products, prescription drugs, and even politicians.

He’ll be speaking at a free public event at Champlain College, sponsored by free speech and privacy supporters, including Vermont Commons, ACLU-VT, VCAM, RETN, Channel 17/ Town Meeting TV, CCTV Center for Media & Democracy, and more. You can get the details and register at http://digitalmediacrossroads.eventbrite.com.

We caught up with Jeff this summer to get a preview of his talk and find out why, as digital media users, we need to be paying attention to the unseen forces that threaten our privacy and human rights.

Thanks for joining us for this interview, Jeff. Tell us how you got involved in media activism.

Jeff Chester: It was always evident that the media played a crucial role in shaping the public’s consciousness about key issues, including war, social justice, and environmental sustainability. Media consolidation, especially in the broadcast and cable TV industry, and a business model dependent on advertising and entertainment, had dramatically reduced the ability of the U.S. media system to serve the public interest. For example, investigative journalism on TV had become almost an extinct species by the late 1970s.

The history of U.S. media tells us, however, that only by engaging in policy advocacy and pressure can one help create an environment that supports public-interest media. But media activism had greatly declined since the early 1970s, and I decided to get involved in helping bring some change. My two initial campaigns were focused on cable TV and public broadcasting. My biggest success, during the 1980s, was the creation of the advocacy effort, which led to the congressional enactment of the Independent Television Service in 1988.

In the old, analog days, we worried a lot about how TV would rot our brains and affect our children. It seemed so simple then. Tell us about your efforts to establish the FCC’s children’s educational programming requirement.

J.C.: One of the very few public-interest policies that advocates were able to get through Congress during the 1980-2000 period was the 1990 Children’s TV Act. It was spearheaded and largely developed by Boston-based advocate Peggy Charren. Her group – Action for Children’s Television – was the single most-effective media-reform group at its time.

However, the Bush Federal Trade Commission (FTC) implemented the law that made it ineffective, with no concrete programming rules. I knew that the growth of cable and the continued on page 8
pending emergence of digital media would require a proactive public-interest regulatory response. If we weren’t able to make the one law that Congress actually passed to improve how the media system worked meaningful, how would we be able to successfully respond to the forthcoming regulatory and political challenges?

Kathryn Montgomery and I created a campaign that forced the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to develop new rules that required at least three hours a week of specifically designed educational programming for children. We initially asked for 10 hours a week, knowing that the industry would force the FCC to reduce the requirement, so we ended up where I expected it to be from the start. We did a study that made the front-page of the New York Times – then a major deal! – which showed that broadcasters were claiming that programs such as The Jetsons and The Flintstones were educational. That embarrassed the industry, and with organizing and pressure over several years we won new rules.

Working with your partner, Kathryn Montgomery, you spearheaded a three-year effort that led to congressional passage of the 1998 Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA). Why was this so important to you?

J.C.: It was evident from the introduction of the commercial Internet in the early 1990s that digital media were going to be shaped by the forces of advertising and marketing. One of the key factors shaping the new medium was its ability to collect data on individuals, through ubiquitous tracking and profiling technologies. The privacy community wanted to see comprehensive federal safeguards to protect everyone online – adults and youth. We played a major role supporting that effort. But we also wanted to do something for children and older youth, given that the paradigm for online was the seamless merging of advertising and editorial content and the delivery of personalized marketing (and other content). Both the Clinton Administration and the online industry opposed our call for new regulatory safeguards to protect the privacy of children. But through studies, major news stories, organizing, pressure, and lots of good ol’ public-interest troublemaking, we helped get the FTC and Congress to support what became COPPA. Still today, sadly, children 12 and under are the only Americans who are required to have an “opt-in” safeguard before any personal data is collected. COPPA has played a major role in limiting the capabilities of marketers to target children online. Now we want to provide the same rights for adolescents, giving them opt-in control (which we also want for adults, too!).

As the Internet exploded in the 1990s, we worried a lot about gatekeepers such as AOL creating “walled gardens” of content, but as you describe, other forces were at work, laying the foundation for today’s media environment. What is different about today’s interactive media environment that we may not even be aware of?

J.C.: We still have problems with media consolidation – in the new media. There has been wave after wave of buyouts and acquisitions. That’s why a company like Google has such a dominant presence. “Old” media companies, like Fox, Comcast, and the phone companies, have made key purchases in digital content and delivery. I fought the Bush FCC plan that gave monopoly control over broadband network access to both the cable and phone companies – the network neutrality issue.

We have a handful of powerful players whose business model is basically dependent on granular forms of data collection and user targeting for advertising. Advertising is playing a largely invisible role shaping our entire digital environment in terms of the services and applications we receive. We will witness a culture that is even more commercial that at present, I fear. These trends are global—and many of the same U.S. companies shaping the future of the Internet, such as Google, Facebook and Microsoft, are the market leaders in Europe and the Asia-Pacific region.

We spend a lot of time worried about who owns these media companies and networks. Is this still an important issue? Or is it more complicated than that?

J.C.: For many years I have been concerned that progressives, public-interest advocates, and community-media supporters have not invested in sustainable digital content and distribution applications and services. The future of the digital media is primarily commercial, and those without the resources will be marginalized. The already giant companies such as Facebook, Google, and the cable/phone companies largely dominate the system. We need to ensure that digital media are as open as possible; hence antitrust and regulation are still important. But we need to be better prepared for an environment where Big Digital Brother will have tremendous clout, and our voices must not get lost in the shadows.

How did the Internet become a surveillance system?

J.C.: In the early 1990s advertisers wanted to ensure the Internet would not become a commercial-free system. Over time, technologies and applications were created that now enable the continuous digital surveillance of almost everyone online. Marketers have wanted to perfect the capability of the Internet, including mobile devices, to track, profile, and target user/individuals wherever they are and whatever they are doing. They have already largely created such a system, including the ability via so-called online ad exchanges, to sell the ability to target a single user in real-time. We are bought and sold through invisible auctions that can accomplish this process in 20 milliseconds.

Broadcasters were claiming that programs such as The Jetsons and The Flintstones were educational.

You talk about the “Scarlet Letter” that will determine what kind of news, information, and entertainment we receive.

J.C.: These technologies of digital surveillance enable so much information to be collected about us, our friends, and our families. Having access to our social media information is now important for marketers and others who are merging our on-line activities with off-line databases. We are being identified and valued by others as worth so much; interested in this or that; that we may be Hispanic, African-American, gay or a liberal. Increasingly, content and services we receive will be carefully tailored and limited to fit into what others think we are, or should be.

And then there is the brave new world of neuromarketing.

What is it? How is neuromarketing used by marketers of products and politicians? Can you point to any good examples?

J.C.: Early in this century, marketers wanted to ensure that they could use the digital media effectively, and they turned to the latest developments in neuroscience and brain behavior. Advertisers and major media companies across the world are using various forms of neuromarketing – content and ads designed to appeal directly to our subconscious mind and bypass rational decision-making. Everyone, from pharma, fast food, and financial companies is using it; even politicians. We need to regulate this new form of subliminal persuasion in the digital era.

(Editors Note: A good reference for this is http://www.niosciencemarketing.com/blog/ and a good example of neuromarketing used in a political context can be found here: http://www.fastcompany.com/1699987/politicians-using-neuromarketing-in-ads-to-win-votes.)

While we concern ourselves with consumer protection and personal privacy at the local level, this way of doing business is becoming a global standard. What policy actions do we need to rally around? Are other countries setting a better example that what we can follow? And, as our young people enter this rapidly changing three-dimensional virtual and commodified world, what do we tell them? How do we guide them?

J.C.: U.S. companies are working with the Obama Administration to help undermine more effective regulatory regimes that protect privacy as a civil right, especially the European Union. We need a strong global standard that protects everyone from tracking and surveillance, whether by a government or a corporate entity. As for youth, we need special safeguards that limit the ability of marketers to easily target them with advertising.

We also need to have a national debate about the consequences to democracy and the environment if we have a digital media system only focused on dollars, and not on human development and social justice.
The End of the Imperial Economy

Book Review

Ron Miller

The End of Growth, by Richard Heinberg
New Society Publishers, 2011

The Wealth of Nature, by John Michael Greer
New Society Publishers, 2011

Sacred Economics, by Charles Eisenstein

The economic meltdown of 2008, followed by government actions to rescue the very financiers who had caused it while tossing crumbs to an underemployed and hurting citizenry, have prompted deep soul-searching about the modern economic system. Some very incisive thinkers have been examining the cultural foundations of that all-pervasive sphere of social life called “the economy”; most of them conclude that its voracious consumption of natural and human wealth has now run up against physical and ecological limits that will bring about a major contraction and cultural transformation.

In this review essay I am considering three of the most recent books, written by three of the most astute observers of the crisis of industrial civilization: Richard Heinberg, John Michael Greer, and Charles Eisenstein. Their views are shared or supplemented by dozens of other critics who are subjecting the imperial reign of Wall Street to severe scrutiny and proposing more democratic and ecologically sensible alternatives. David Korten’s body of work (most recently, Agenda for a New Economy), Riane Eisler’s The Real Wealth of Nations, the emerging field of ecological economics, and many recent books on the 2008 crash reflect a developing consensus that we are on the verge of a radical transformation of the global economic system. Readers of Vermont Commons are familiar with much of this literature because our interest in decentralizing political power requires understanding that concentrated economic power is an intrinsic element of imperial expansion.

Heinberg, Greer, and Eisenstein bring quite different perspectives and analytical tools to their critiques, but their views complement each other and converge on the assertion that the days of the global industrial economy are numbered. Let’s start with Heinberg, a careful journalist who has been tracking the reality and implications of peak oil since his 2003 book The Party’s Over. In The End of Growth, he meticulously traces the causes of the current recession, going back in history to the rise of the global economic system and the political and ideological biases underlying modern economic theory. He discusses the boom-and-bust cycles that are endemic to the functioning of the economic system and governments’ increasingly frantic attempts to contain them. He explains the role of “fractional reserve banking” – the creation of money through the increasing of debt – and shows why continuous growth is necessary for servicing that debt; the system is not unlike a huge Ponzi scheme that always requires new players (borrowers, consumers, producers) to stay intact.

However, observes Heinberg, because the physical resources of the planet are finite, perpetual economic growth is simply not possible. And the time when the industrial economy will start running into the planet’s “non-negotiable constraints” is not in the far-off future. It is now. We have arrived at a major turning point, and we are going to need to deal with this fact. “Economic growth as we have known it is over and done with.”

Heinberg supports this argument with numerous graphs demonstrating trends in indebtedness, resource consumption, energy prices, and other relevant data. This avalanche of information is a little overwhelming, but it provides a solid basis for understanding why the system collapsed in 2008 and, more important, why it is not likely to bounce back this time. The crisis that began three years ago represents a fundamental break from previous patterns. Shortages of resources, particularly fossil fuels, make any plan for resuming economic growth “a flight from reality.”

continued on page 10
Money and credit, explains Heinberg, are ultimately claims on future production. The economy functions as long as these claims can potentially be honored. When it becomes apparent that further economic growth is not possible, the entire financial system will collapse. Heinberg addresses the arguments that technological innovation, improved efficiency, or renewable energy sources will keep the economy growing. Human ingenuity may come up with a few more tricks for forestalling the inevitable, but in the end, he says, the dire warning of Thomas Malthus, that the Earth cannot sustain endless growth, will prove to be correct. Heinberg even provides a detailed analysis of China’s current economic boom and explains why it, too, will inevitably peak and decline.

The End of Growth is not the shrill cry of a “doomer” or “neo-primitivist” castigating modern civilization, but a dispassionate, methodical analysis of the situation humanity faces and the options available to us now. Heinberg goes into considerable detail in explaining how we can adapt to the new reality. Primarily, this will involve reversing the trends toward globalization and specialization, and striving instead for localization and resilience. Heinberg endorses many of the strategies that Transition Town initiatives and other resilience activists have been promoting: We will need a new system of money that is not debt-based, and ways of measuring authentic wealth and community health, instead of the currently sacred GDP. Economic theory must account for the true value of natural processes and the true ecological costs of production. We will need to learn to use fewer resources and much less energy, embracing “voluntary simplicity,” appropriate technology, and more communitarian values. This amounts to no less than changing “our way of life and the fundamental structures of society.” Heinberg acknowledges that this is a lot to ask, but his book makes it strikingly clear that we really don’t have a choice.

In The Wealth of Nature: Economics as if Survival Mattered, John Michael Greer brings his distinctive wide-ranging perspective to these issues. As in his previous books, The Long Descent and The Ecotechnic Future, Greer inquires deeply into the cultural foundations of modern life and institutions, and he identifies underlying historical patterns that make sense of our confusing times. Its title already alerts the reader that this book promises a deep rethink of Adam Smith’s Wealth of Nations. Greer argues that the life of the planet, rather than self-interested manipulation of “resources,” is of primary importance. Building on E. F. Schumacher’s pioneering work, he questions common assumptions about “the economy” and the “free market,” deconstructs the mythology underlying the professional field of economics, and emphasizes, like Heinberg, that the looming reality of peak oil threatens to shatter most of the habitual and cherished practices of modern society.

There is something thrilling about reading Greer, a realization that he has put his finger on profoundly but long-ignored or suppressed truths about global industrial civilization. He frankly observes what many of us have come to suspect but cannot find acknowledged in this culture’s dominant discourse: The emperor—or in this case the empire itself—wears very tattered clothing that is about to fall off.

Greer’s central concept here is his description of three co-existing economies. The world of Wall Street, corporate boardrooms, professional economists, and government bureaucrats does not constitute the “economy” but a “tertiary” economy—an abstract representation of wealth, artificially measured in terms of money. The primary economy, the actual basis for wealth, is the exchange of energy and materials in the natural world—the ecology of living beings on a physically specific and limited planet. Human societies make use of this biophysical bounty through inventiveness, labor, and mechanisms for evaluating and trading goods. Greer calls this the secondary economy, and shows how it is obviously dependent on the primary.

Both the primary and secondary economies are sustained by responding to negative feedback; limits have consequences, and behavior is regulated. The abstract, tertiary economy of financial manipulation, however, is driven by positive feedback: paper wealth produces more paper wealth, growth demands even more growth, speculative bubbles generate a mob mentality. The “wealth” of this economy is far out of proportion to the actual material wealth available. One obvious result is the increasingly dramatic differentiation between the very few who profit from this manipulation and the stagnant or declining standard of living for everyone else. Only a system intoxicated by the temporary abundance of concentrated, cheap energy (fossil fuels) can sustain this sort of growth, and with the depletion of this energy, the collapse of the money economy is imminent.

Like Heinberg, Greer finds significance in the repetitive cycle of economic bubbles—situations where abstract wealth zooms well beyond any authentic economic value, only to burst when the game of financial manipulation runs out of willing players. Greer argues that fossil fuel-fed industrialization is itself “the mother of all speculative bubbles.” As the fuel becomes more scarce, this game too will be up, and the abstract wealth it generated will lose its value through a very natural process of inflation.

Greer goes into great detail on many related matters, explaining, for example, how the second law of thermodynamics (entropy) definitely limits the extent to which renewable, diffuse energy sources can replace the uniquely concentrated forms of energy in fossil fuels. With significantly less energy available in the near future, the entire modern project of technological progress will become untenable: “Many of the most basic ways that modern industrial societies use energy,” he says, “make sense only if energy is so cheap and abundant that waste simply isn’t something to worry about.” Now that we do need to begin worrying about waste, we will find that most of our technological infrastructure—the electrical grid, the Internet, and the use of machines to replace most human labor—becomes economically unfeasible. Greer foresees a return to human labor in local, craft-based economies. Small is not only beautiful, it is now increasingly necessary.

Finally, I wish to draw attention to a third remarkable book that appeared this summer, Charles Eisenstein’s Sacred Economics: Money, Gift, & Society in the Age of Transition. Eisenstein is another holistic, synthesizing theorist who has studied cultural patterns through history to figure out where modernity came from and where it is heading. His earlier book, The Ascent of Humanity, was a brilliant and challenging account of the evolution of modern consciousness, and in Sacred Economics he focuses his analysis more specifically on the role of money in civilization.

Eisenstein is primarily concerned with modern humanity’s separation from the sacred, living world. For millennia, primordial cultures practiced gift economies, which honored the concrete individuality of natural things and human beings. The introduction of money cast a haze of abstraction over our relationships to each other and to the living world. “(O)f all things that deny uniqueness and relatedness, money is foremost.” Consequently, “we live in a world that has been shorn of its sacredness, so that very few things indeed give us the feeling of living in a sacred world. Mass-produced,
standardized commodities, cookie-cutter houses, identical packages of food, and anonymous relationships with institutional functionaries all deny the uniqueness of the world.

The commodification of every aspect of life is driven by the need to grow the economy, which in turn is driven by the practice of usury (charging interest to make money off of money) that is embedded at the core of the money economy. Like the other theorists, Eisenstein observes that the staggering accumulation of debt in our time benefits the owners of money but impoverishes everyone else. “In an interest-based system, class war is inevitable,” he comments. Furthermore, the ever-expanding money system turns all human relationships (even such primary ones as caring for children) into commodities for sale, making them artificially scarce and denying the connections essential to true community.

Again like the other theorists, Eisenstein believes that modern civilization is presently crashing into social, economic, and ecological limits. The coming collapse, he suggests, will be a rite of passage that takes humanity from an adolescent phase to a more mature relationship with the planet; we are experiencing the end of the age of separation and the stirrings of a new age of reunion. He argues that the transformation humanity needs now is essentially spiritual—a re-definition of who we are. “Looking out upon the strip mines and the clear-cuts and the dead zones and the genocides and the debased consumer culture, we ask, What is the origin of this monstrous machine that chews up beauty and spits out money? The discrete and separate self, surveying a universe that is fundamentally Other, naturally treats the natural and human world as a pile of instrumental, accidental stuff. The rest of the world is fundamentally not-self.” Sacred economics rests on a re-identification with all of life.

The second half of Sacred Economics lays out a comprehensive plan for redefining money in accordance with ecological realities and the deep human longing for connection, meaning, and purpose. Building on theorists as diverse as Aristotle, Henry George, John Maynard Keynes, and Silvio Gesell (who devised a system of demurrage or negative-interest money a century ago), Eisenstein proposes a number of innovations and policy shifts he claims can guide a relatively orderly transition to a localized, steady state (i.e. no-growth) economy. He goes into great detail explaining how negative interest would drastically diminish speculation and hoarding, by making money as perishable as the natural goods it claims to represent. He endorses a version of George’s “single tax” on land and other tax policies that encourage economic exchange but discourage self-interested plundering of the planet. His plan includes policies for protecting the commons, preventing the externalization of production costs, and promoting complementary currencies and exchange systems.

As I am not trained in economics myself, and the subject of the global economic system is so enormously complex, I confess that I do not know how to evaluate these three works critically. I can only say that together, they provide a panoramic picture of the current world crisis that is very clear and very convincing whether or not all the details add up. After impressive research into various fields of literature and much careful reflection, all of these authors conclude that the age of resource abundance, economic growth, and the rule of money is coming to a close. They all believe that humanity can transition to a simpler, more localized civilization whose human-scale quality of life would more than make up for the loss of conveniences and luxuries we had come to expect during the age of cheap energy. But they all warn that if we want to make this transition relatively gracefully, we need to revise our core assumptions and begin practicing new lifestyles—and we need to start now. •
Fukushima: “There Will Not Be a Second Chance”

by Shimpei Murakami

Adapted from the transcription of a speech given by Shimpei Murakami

I had decided to have a livelihood based on farming

My name is Shimpei Murakami. I settled in Iitate-mura in 2002. Prior to that, I worked overseas for about 20 years, doing aid work through nonprofit organizations. During my time overseas, I was greatly disturbed by the inequity that exists in the world. Many people in Bangladesh, India, Thailand, and some African nations where I worked struggled to get their daily food. Gradually, I came to learn the poverty I was witnessing was, in fact, created – it was created by the global economic system imposed by the industrialized nations, such as Japan.

In 2002, I decided to go back to Japan in order to be a farmer myself, and to live a life that doesn’t exploit nature or people. I wanted to disassociate myself from the economic system that extorts wealth from the developing nations. I wanted to create a community based on self-sufficiency. With this determination, I settled in Iitate-mura.

March 11, 2011

This day was meant to be a day of celebration for us, because we were putting the finishing touches on the frames of the bungalow I and my farm intern, Sakata, were building. We finished the work in the morning by successfully fixing the ridge on the roof. But the weather turned a little dubious in the afternoon, so instead of continuing with the building work, I got up on the roof and started to check the joints. While I was pounding each joint with a large wooden mallet, the earthquake struck. (2:46 p.m.)

I had experienced a fairly large earthquake about 30 years before. But this was beyond anything I could ever imagined. Initially, the surrounding mountains started to rumble in a spooky way. “What is this?” I said to myself. Then suddenly the ground started to move violently. I couldn’t keep standing up. I straddled over one of the beams and held onto a roof post. There were multiple waves of shakes that went on for about five minutes. Normal earthquakes don’t last much longer than a minute, a minute and a half at most. After the initial earthquake, aftershocks continued ever so frequently, almost every five minutes it seemed.

In between those aftershocks, I managed to complete the joint checks and came down to the ground. I then went over to see my house, the restaurant, and the barn. Fortunately, there was little structural damage to those buildings. Inside, books, food, and fair-trade goods displayed at the restaurant were strewn on the floor. Still, the damage was minimal and I was greatly relieved.

When I was picking up stuff with Sakata, a neighbor came by and asked about the damage we suffered. I told him we were fine. He informed us that our village of Iitate seemed to be spared large damages. “However,” he continued, “the neigh-boring coastal cities were seriously damaged by a tsunami, they say.”

Sakata and I listened to the radio reports on the tsunami devastation, and while we were eating dinner we talked about how fortunate we were. “Even with such a massive disaster, at our farm we have plenty of food – rice, all kinds of vegetables, grains, preserved food – for us to survive just fine. There is spring water here and we have wood for cooking, too. We’ve lost power, but we have absolutely nothing to worry about. Perhaps we should think about what we can do to help our neighboring communities.”

This was a moment of affirmation for the self-sufficient lifestyle I had chosen. We had security here, even when a natural disaster caused the disruption of lifelines elsewhere.

“Let’s get out of here, now!”

Then – it was around 6:00 in the afternoon – the radio news reported that the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear power plant lost its emergency power source due to the tsunami. Because of the total loss of power at the plant, the cooling system was not functioning, it said.

Since I was occasionally involved in anti-nuclear activism even before the Chernobyl accident, I knew very well that meltdown could occur if the reactor core got exposed by the cooling-system failure. It could even trigger hydrogen explosions in the reactor. So, upon hearing the news, an indescribable feeling crept inside me: Will it come to this, that I may have to leave this farm?

I needed more information to make a sound judgment. I took the battery out of the farm truck, hooked it up to the AC converter, and supplied enough power to run the internet, TV, and telephone. Then I started to gather information on the status of the reactors. The news said the water level at reactor #1 was down and the reactor core was exposed by about 1.4 meters. This is looking really bad, I thought, and kept my eyes on the TV. Around 9:45 p.m. it reported the cooling water was back up and it now filled the reactor core to the top. Strangely, in almost an artificial manner, the announcer asked the expert analyst beside him, “The fact that the cooling water reached the top means that the core is getting cooled and that everything is okay now, right?” The analyst looked a bit taken aback by this question, but he nevertheless averred, “It means the cooling function is recovered, and yes, it’s safe now.”

When I heard that, a slight doubt went through my mind – but it was erased by the overwhelming sense of relief. I don’t need to leave this place! With this peace of mind, I went to bed.

I couldn’t sleep well, however. Anxiety was there. And I couldn’t help thinking about the situation in the other reactors.

Around 2 a.m. on the 12th, I heard a car stop outside. Who on earth at such an hour, driving up on the snow-covered road? It was my wife. As soon as she got out the car, she said to me, “Let’s get out of here, now!”

“What’s going on? Calm down, and please tell me what happened.”

She was visiting her friend in Fukushima City when the earthquake hit. Just before the earthquake, another friend of her friend’s showed up. This visitor happened to be an activist who has been opposed to the plutonium-thermal power generation at the Fukushima Dai-ichi’s #3 reactor. After the earthquake, they were getting a lot of information that was not reported in the news, thanks to this visitor’s network. It became clear to them that what the government was saying was not true, and that the meltdown might have already begun. At midnight, they decided to flee as far away as possible from the reactors. My wife was urged to come along, but she just couldn’t leave me behind. So she rushed home.
As I listened to her story, I kept hoping that this was misinformation. "When did you get this information on the possible meltdown? If it was before 10 p.m. you probably didn't know the situation improved afterwards," I told her.

But my wife insisted that they made the decision to flee around midnight. So I looked up the latest news on the internet. The latest news, at 2:05 a.m., read, "The core is exposed again."

"Yes, this is really serious," I realized. We could have explosions like in Chernobyl. I woke Sakata and we gathered the basic stuff to take with us. At 3 a.m. my wife, my children, Sakata, and I, left Iitate-mura for Yamagata prefecture.

Leaving Iitate-mura behind

We stayed at my sister's in Yamagata for a couple of days. While there, we monitored the situation in Fukushima. The #1 reactor had a hydrogen explosion after 3 p.m. on the 12th. On the 13th, the #3 reactor's situation worsened just as the #1 had, and there was an imminent danger of another explosion. I wanted to hold onto some hope, but it was getting almost impossible to do so...

We left Yamagata early in the morning on the 14th. We took a western route and dropped Sakata off in Gifu prefecture where his wife was waiting for him. Then we drove to Shizuoka prefecture, to my wife's parents'. En route, the #3 reactor blew up, shooting up black smoke more than 500 meters above, as if a small nuclear bomb had gone off.

At my wife's parents', we discussed our future. Some friends in Okayama prefecture had invited us to come and stay, so we were now thinking of going to Okayama.

An outside situation intervened. The explosion of the #3 reactor on the 14th caused a mass exodus of people out of Fukushima. A friend in Fukushima contacted me. "Do you know any place that can accommodate us? We got out of Fukushima all right, but no evacuation shelter is willing to take us in."

This friend was traveling in a group of 20 people. Private homes can't accommodate that many people, so I contacted my old high school and its umbrella organization, the Aino-gakuen and the Aino-kai, in Mie prefecture.

I am a trustee of the Aino-kai. I am also a graduate of the Aino-gakuen, which is the only high school in Japan to teach organic farming. Because of my connection there, I was able to have the school agree to house those refugees from Fukushima, with me as their guardian.

On March 15th, on the eve of my departure for Mie, after finishing packing I found myself alone upstairs. I took the opportunity to reflect on the past four days - what long and turbulent days with sleepless nights. I wondered whether I would ever be able to go back to Iitate-mura. And I contemplated the meaning of this event to my life.

Then, around 11 p.m., my wife came to see me with an urgent expression. She had just heard the report on the radioactivity in Fukushima's air. This was the first test that the prefecture conducted after the accident, and the samples were taken not in the vicinity of the reactors but from outside the 30-kilometer zone: 0.8μSv/h in Koriyama City and 1μSv/h in Fukushima City. And 3μSv/h in Iitate-mura! (The normal air radiation level in Japan is lower than 0.05μSv/h.)

"Ah, that's it. I will not be able to go back to Iitate-mura ever again. Iitate-mura has no doubt become a hotspot."

When the Chernobyl accident happened, the highly contaminated areas – so-called "hotspots" – didn't conform to the concentric circles drawn on the map. It was not the distance from the reactor, but the topography, the wind direction, and the weather that determined the hotspots. And Iitate-mura has fallen victim to the unfortunate conversion of those factors.

As this awareness hit me, I heard a voice in my head: "Don't look back any more." Okay. Everything we had nurtured and built got left behind, but we shouldn't look back. Just keep moving forward, the voice said. For a starter, I had those refugees from Fukushima whom I was responsible for relocation. I realized I should focus on this task and not think about anything beyond that.

I begin sharing my experience with others

Initially, I was not interested in talking in public about what happened to me. I was too preoccupied with starting my life from scratch. However, a phone call from France changed everything. It was a Japanese person who was teaching anthropology in a French university, a total stranger to me. This person urged me to come to France and talk about Fukushima. I was skeptical about this invitation at first, since France is the country that relies on nuclear power for 80 percent of its electricity. Still, in the end, I was moved by the seriousness of this person, and made my trip there from May 13th to 22nd.

My first stop was in Marseilles. I spoke about my personal experience at a symposium of an organization that protects family farms. The audience's empathy was palpable. Some had tears, some shook my hand, and many people talked to me afterward, expressing their feelings, sympathy, and encouragement. I felt a resonance created between those French people and me. I was filled with its energy.

Successive speeches I gave in four other locales brought similar experiences. I was more energized each time.

I have sought to live in a sustainable community where people share, instead of competing for resources. I have sought a life where neighbors help each other and people appreciate the abundance of nature. For me, nuclear power represents something that denies all this at the very root. In order to realize a nuclear-free society, I must keep telling my story to the rest of the world. My trip to France crystallized this sense of mission in me.

Stopping nuclear power is the first step toward hope

A university professor friend conducted a fixed-point testing of radiation levels in Iitate-mura. My farm was chosen as one of the testing sites. On May 1, the readings on my farm were: 7.8μSv/h at 1 meter above ground; 15μSv/h on the ground; and 50μSv/h under the gutter drain pipe. What was even more discouraging was that even soil samples 10 centimeters below the surface showed high levels of radiation: 10μSv/h in the garden soil, and 15μSv/h in the humus-rich soil from the woods.

This professor friend told me, unless we remove the topsoil by 30 cm (a foot), we may not be able to use it for decades – or worse, over a hundred years.

When the Chernobyl accident happened, it really affected me. I wanted to stop all the nuclear reactors in Japan. Anti-nuclear movements surged throughout Japan at the time. However, the Japanese government and the power companies ignored such public sentiments. They brainwashed the citizens with the bogus lies that "nuclear power is safe, economical, and clean." They proceeded to create even more reactors by bribing communities with huge amounts of money.

The futile anti-nuclear efforts wore me out. I was left with feelings of powerlessness and fatigue. Eventually I redirected my energy toward creating my own life over which I could have control. Moving to Iitate-mura was a manifestation of my desire to start something positive.

I told people in France, "What happened to me is what can happen to you. Because my life before Fukushima had been just like yours."

I ask you all: Does our society really love our children and wish them to have happy lives in the future?

If the answer is yes, we must, at a minimum, stop all the reactors. That's how I feel. How about you?

And we also have a duty to do everything we can to come up with safe methods of processing and deposing nuclear waste.

Modern societies have created systems that destroy nature and discard human lives. The worst of these is nuclear power, which became apparent with the Fukushima accidents. In this sense, Fukushima is a warning from nature (or god). Are we capable of humbly heeding this warning? Could this be the starting point for new ways of life – not living just for the moment, not being destructive, but finally taking the responsibility for our future?

If we miss this opportunity, there will be no second chance.
Listening to NPR (National Propaganda Radio) in the early hours after the Oslo attacks, I was less than shocked to hear that three out of the three explanations offered for the attacks were Islamic Terrorism™. I posted to Facebook: “Maybe it wasn’t the Ay-rabs in Oslo, y’all?! This goes beyond not keeping it in your pants. You folks just left the house with no pants this morning.”

Turns out, all it took to get the “All Al Qaeda, All the time” meme circulating was a single claim by a single man that a hitherto-unknown member of a hitherto-unknown Jihadist group had claimed responsibility for the attack. That was sufficiently proof-like for every major U.S. news agency to report that this was an act of Islamic terror. That the mainstream media (MSM) mistook their responsibility to wait for facts rather than yelping “first!” and vomiting groundless supposition all over the interwebs in a mad rush to pantless morning meeting isn’t really surprising or interesting. What is truly fascinating is watching them all attempt to walk back their premature — heh, hem — issuances and desperately attempt to rebrand this story as “The Not-Terrorism Attack” now that the bad guy is a “white, Christian, conservative, gun-owning, patriotic small business-man opposed to socialism, immigration policy and Muslims.” Man, o’ Manischewitz, it is hard out there for a pimp when what you are pimpin’ is the deeply cynical and purposeful idea that acts of terrorism can only be committed by Muslims. Mark my words (go ahead, mark ‘em; I’ll wait...), Anders Behring Breivik will be called an extremist and dismissed as an aberration, because if we call a right-wing extremist a terrorist a dozen popular bloggers, another dozen mainstream political organizations, and most of the Republican candidates for president will have to put under surveillance or arrested.

The MSM can’t call all acts of violence motivated by ideology with the intention to intimidate and castrate terrorism when the heart and soul of half our political duopoly thinks these tactics are not just fine and dandy but positively righteous; watering the tree of Liberty and all that Jeffersonian high-and-mighty-just-don’t-talk-to-me-I-can’t-own-people crap. Yeah, only Muslims can be Terrorists and we aren’t at war in Libya because we don’t have “boots on the ground” and we aren’t at war in Pakistan or Yemen or Somalia because we only kill people there with drones. Speaking of Somalia, it’s worth noting the conspicuous lack of calls for “humanitarian intervention” in Somalia beyond sending processed vegetable protein rations. I guess this makes sense because, let’s be honest, those people are used to dying of starvation and being left to shrivel in the sun. It’s, like, part of their culture. ‘Sides, having the surviving population being permanently brain damaged by malnutrition will make our eventual takeover of African resources as easy as, well, knocking over a retard and taking their stuff. All in all, the level of semantic “management” taking place in government and the MSM these days must be making George Orwell do the Electric Slide, the Hustle and the Macarena in his grave.

Let’s suspend our “Sandy Browns Only” policy for the term “terrorist” for a moment and consider this: how would the U.S. government and the mainstream media react if it were revealed that a nationwide group of extremely religious people had embarked upon a well-documented and -publicized campaign to seize control of all U.S institutions and impose a strict theocracy? What if this organization had infiltrated the highest levels of government and civil society? What if they started calling their churches “armories” and their followers “warriors”? What if they were called the New Apostolic Reformation (which they are), and Rick Perry, Newt Gingrich, Michele Bachmann, Mike Huckabee, and Sarah Palin were all followers? Man, it’s getting so crazy in here that even the “looks like a duck and sounds like a duck” test ain’t no good anymore.

The takeaway here is that they must maintain the fiction of the ever-threatening, murderous “other” (and this other must not be white or Christian; that would be confusing), and then attempt to tuck it into all the spaces that evil can fill — despite the fact that most terrorism is nationalistic and not Islamic. They must do this to position the Middle East as a fetid snake pit of hatred for small-town parades, NASCAR, and booty shorts, and Islam as a religion predomi-

Eradicating all other faiths is their long game, after all. This serves the desired end of shaping the people that live on top of “our” oil as infinitely kilable.

To mistake the objective of the U.S. of Empire’s ever-expanding occupation of the Middle East as an effort to protect Americans from terrorism is, well, a big fucking mistake. The United States military/industrial complex has created the majority of the animosity in the Middle East by occupying their countries, killing civilians, leaving the breathers without water and power and police and courts and all the shit we are supposed to think they didn’t have under their former government, and then herding whoever’s too scared to stay there they’re at into refugee camps. Put yourself in their shoes and tell me you wouldn’t be rightfully, murderously angry, too.

When they fight back we use this as rationale to hit them even harder. It’s perfectly pathological — and it’s working.

The United States is occupying the Middle East to secure corporate access to the scarce and sour resources that lay under that hot dusty place — resources the whole world, but mostly China, needs to hold together every single link in the chain. Our political process is owned by corporate behemoths that are stultified and uncreative and completely vested in the perpetuation of the status quo and the corporate-charter, quarter-to-quarter, short-term thinking that prohibits any rational, pragmatic planning for our long and bumpy ride down the supply curve. Our legislators are too in love with their business cards, and most of our people are too blinded by cognitive dissonance and the belief that the ability to buy cheap crap = freedom, to right the ship of state. If you can stomach it (I’m out) you can listen to politicians from both sides of the aisle blow smoke up your butt talking about incentivizing renewable energy (but only after incentivizing the living crap out of fossil fuels) and increasing fuel standards (by 2035! We’ll all be eating Haitian-style dirt cookies by then!). Dick Cheney may be “more machine than man now, twisted and evil,” as one Ben Kenobi said about one Darth Vader, but he isn’t stupid; the architects of our Middle East policy know what’s up; it’s too damn late for orderly transitions and anything they say to the contrary is pabulum intended to forestall the coming shit storm long enough for the cement to cool on their bunkers.

I am always happy to live in Vermont, but never more so than when I contemplate the level of anger and social breakdown that will accompany the mass recognition of the end of the age of oil and what resources and opportunities we knowingly squandered during its death throes. I am convinced that there is more awareness per capita here in Vermont (along with artisan bakeries and breweries!) than anywhere else in our swollen, broken United States, and this awareness is going to serve us well. We won’t be wasting precious energy on the first few stages of post-imperial grief — and most of those stuck at stages one and two will never make it over the Green Mountains.
2011. For more than five years, Vermont Commons has been a traditional print newspaper supported by our web site. It is now time for Vermont Commons to take full advantage of the Web 2.0 revolution, make a radical informational shift, and become a more robust interactive open source web site, one that someday soon, again will be supported by our print newspaper. To make this happen effectively, we have decided to suspend our print operation for 2012, to focus all of our energies on our new open source web site as it comes online, featuring as many Vermont voices of good will as are interested in participating. All of the content from all 44 of our print issues will be archived and easily accessed at our new open source web site, which will feature the latest open source tools for ready sharing of independence-minded information, ideas, and projects from around Vermont and beyond.

Second, we are moving to collect the best content from our first 44 issues of Vermont Commons into book form in time for the fall 2012 election season. Our hope is to find a wider readership for and to document in more permanent form the many solutions-oriented ideas featured in our journal as Vermonters consider how best to move forward at a time of great transition for our once and future republic, the United States of Empire, and the world as a whole.

Finally, we have established a Vermont Commons news COOPerative, for any Vermonter interested in investing their money, time, and energy in our independent news venture. The details can be found on the back page of this issue, and our first COOP meeting will take place in January 2012. Details will be posted at our new web site later this fall.

Will Vermont Commons be back in print? If the Mayan prophecies that speak of the world’s end in 2012 are inaccurate, we plan on being back in print in early 2013, once our new web site emerges full flower in this next year. In the meantime, keep visiting our www.vtcommons.org web site this fall for updates, and soon, our brand new web site.

In times of great transition, the only constant is change, and we at Vermont Commons will continue to bring our readers the very best in independent-minded Green Mountains-based news and commentary in the months ahead.

Free Vermont.
Long live the UNtied States.
Long Live the Second Vermont Republic!

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. In our Summer 2011 issue, Kauffman wrote at length about UVM political scientist Frank Bryan, well-known for his “independence” streak. Here, we present our sixth installment from Kauffman’s book.

Having met Mr. Bryan, you may understand why it was not all that startling when organizers billed the Vermont Independence Convention of October 28, 2005, as “the first statewide convention on secession in the United States since North Carolina voted to secede from the Union on May 20, 1861.”

North Carolina overcame its unionist scruples with some reluctance, but the 250 or so Vermonsters gathered in Montpelier, coziest of state capitals, gloried in the prospect of disunion. Montpelier is the only McDonald’s-less state capital in the land, and from its late-October splendor issued a Jeffersonian firebell in the night, ringing a warning to the national capital: The United States deserves a break(up) today.

Only in Vermont, with its Town Meeting tradition and tolerance of radical dissent, would the golden-domed State Capitol be given over to a convention exploring the whys and wherefores of splitting from the United States. And all for a rental fee of $35! (It would have been free if the disunionists had knocked off by 4 p.m.) It was richly symbolic, messily democratic, and funkily audacious. (You can do that in Vermont; Sacramento has as many lobbyists as Montpelier has people.)

Thomas Naylor, the Mississippi native and longtime professor of economics at Duke who migrated north in retirement in 1993 to the Green Mountain State, is the founder, theoretician, and chief sticker-of-stamps-on-envelopes for the Second Vermont Republic (SVR), which declares itself “a peaceful, democratic, grassroots, libertarian populist movement committed to the return of Vermont to its status as an independent republic as it once was between 1777 and 1791.”

The Second Vermont Republic has a clear, if not simple, mission: “Our primary objective is to extricate Vermont peacefully from the United States as soon as possible.” The SVR people are not doing this to “make a point” or to stretch the boundaries of debate. They really want out.

Although SVR members range from hippie greens to gun owners (and among the virtues of Vermont is that the twain do sometimes meet), Naylor describes his group’s ideological coloration as “leftish libertarian with an anarchist streak.”

The SVR lauds the principles and practices of direct democracy, local control of education and health care, small-scale farming, neighborhood enterprise, and the devolution of political power. The movement is anti-globalist and sees beauty in the small. It detests Wal-Mart, the Interstate Highway System, and a foreign policy that is “immoral, illegal, and unconstitutional.” It draws inspiration from, among others, Aleksandr Solzhentitsyn, who in bidding farewell to his neighbors in Cavendish, Vermont, where he had lived in exile for 17 years, praised “the sensible and sure process of grassroots democracy, in which the local population solves most of its problems on its own, not waiting for the decisions of higher authorities.”

Naylor likes to say that Wal-Mart, which is “too big, too powerful, too mean-spirited, too materialistic, too dehumanizing, too undemocratic, too environmentally insensitive, and too unresponsive to the social, cultural, and economic needs of individual citizens and small communities,” is the American metaphor in these post-republican days. Perhaps it is. So why not a new metaphor, suggests Naylor: that of Vermont, which is “smaller, more rural, more democratic, less violent, less commercial, more egalitarian, and more independent” than its sister states?

When Naylor laid out the case for independence in The Vermont Manifesto (2003), the political air was heavy, sodden,statist. “Even in the best of times secession is a very tough sell in the USA,” lamented Naylor in 2002. “Since September 11, it has proven to be an impossible sell.” But George and Dick, for whom Vermont was just another inconsequential state full of potential body-bag fillers, came to the rescue, putting a rebarbative face on the empire and opening the door to radical possibilities.

In stepped the Second Vermont Republic, with a blend of whimsicality and seriousness and “eye-catching street theater [that] has proven irresistible to the media,” according to Cathy Resmer of the Burlington weekly Seven Days. With polemical wit provided by Vermont’s Bread and Puppet Theater, the SVR has staged mock funeral processions (on January 10, anniversary of the 1791 vote of 105–4 by which a Vermont state convention voted to join the union), parades, and Fourth of July floats in which children declared their independence from bedtime, “annoying siblings,” and “my floaties.” There are us OUT of VERMONT T-shirts sold at Riverwalk Records in Montpelier and a rousing anthem: “Two Hundred Years Is Long Enough” by Pete Sutherland and the Clayfoot Strutters. (Sample verse: “Why should we feed the bankers, if they won’t feed our farms/Or run and point a gun at folks who ain’t done us no harm!?”) The SVR has even achieved a symbolic political success, persuading the Legislature to declare January 16 Vermont Independence Day in commemoration of the establishment of the First Vermont Republic in 1777. The SVR’s tincure is green, but conservative, too, and although Naylor refuses to kiss up to his state’s hack politicians (he calls Democratic U.S. Senator Patrick Leahy “a world-class prostitute”), the Republican lieutenant governor at the time of the convention praised SVR members for “their energy and their passion.”

Secessionist whispers have souffled through Vermont for years. The state’s blessed contrariness is an expression of what Frank Bryan and Bill Kauffman have written about in their books, seven安装ments from which Kauffman has been publishing excerpts to this day.

The Vermont independence movement is anti-globalist and sees beauty in the small.

It detests Wal-Mart, the Interstate Highway System, and a foreign policy that is “immoral, illegal, and unconstitutional.”
speaks radical notions with a conservative diction. It operates at the political fringe yet attracts such eminent establishmentarians as John Kenneth Galbraith, who communicated his “pleasure in, and approval of the Second Vermont Republic.”

Or consider the case of George Kennan, to whom *The Vermont Manifesto* and its follow-up, *Secession: How Vermont and All the Other States Can Save Themselves from the Empire* (2008), are dedicated and whom Thomas Naylor calls “the godfather of the movement.” Kennan – diplomat, memoirist, the only Wise Man of the 1940s worthy of the sobriquet – had speculated about the United States devolving into “a dozen constituent republics” in his valediction *Around the Cragged Hill* (1993).

Nearing his centenary (he died March 17, 2005, at the age of 101), Kennan became much taken with the idea of an independent Vermont, although he told Naylor that “we are, I fear, a lonely band; until some of the things we have written are discovered by what we may hope will be a more thoughtful and serious generation of critics and reviewers, I am afraid we will remain that way.” Kennan’s secession letters, dictated from a sickbed, are pointed and poignant. “All power to Vermont in its effort to distinguish itself from the USA as a whole, and to pursue in its own way the cultivation of its own tradition,” he wrote in May 2002.

This was no deathbed conversion. As a young foreign service officer during the Second World War, Kennan had written a position paper for Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles in which he urged a policy for postwar Germany of a “return to the particularism of the eighteenth century – a return to the small kingdoms, the chocolate soldiers, the picturesque localisms of an earlier day.”

In his lengthiest discourse on the subject, Kennan wrote Naylor that in the matter of independence for Vermont and her neighbors, “I see nothing fanciful, and nothing towards the realization of which the efforts of enlightened people might not be usefully directed. Such are at present the dominating trends in the US that I can see no other means of ultimate preservation of cultural and societal values that will not only be endangered but eventually destroyed in an endlessly prolonged association of the northern parts of New England with the remainder of what is now the USA.”

Ah, but there is a complication. Kennan was attracted to the Second Vermont Republic partly because he deplored the Hispanicization of the United States. Instancing Mexican immigration, Kennan saw “unmistakable evidences of a growing differentiation between the cultures, respectively, of large southern and southwestern regions of this country, on the one hand,” and those of “some northern regions,” including Vermont. In the former, “the very culture of the bulk of the population of these regions will tend to be primarily Latin-American in nature rather than what is inherited from earlier American traditions.”

“Could it really be that there was so little of merit” in the American republic, asked Kennan, “that it deserves to be recklessly trashed in favor of [a] polyglot mix-mash?” This wasp never did lose his sting.

It is no small portion of Vermont’s charm that the secessionists were given use of the Statehouse in Montpelier, which lent a certain sobriety to what might otherwise have been a rambunctiously motley conference. Thomas Naylor fretted the night before the convention that the crowd might overwhelm the two-man Capitol security force, but not to worry: The secessionists behaved splendidly, so that the officers had no duties more pressing than giving directions to the restrooms and transmitting the request, “Will the owner of a black Mercedes please move your vehicle?”

Days of Rage these were not.

The Reverend Ben T. Matchstick, a radical puppeteer, called the assembly to irreverent order with a benediction invoking “the flounder, the sunfish, and the holy mackerel.” Men in business suits, white-maned Vermont earth mothers, and ponytailed college kids wearing winter skullcaps indoors packed Representatives Hall, sitting at the desks elsetimes occupied by state representatives and filling the room with the fragrance of winsome rebellion and localist patriotism.

Under a portrait of George Washington, Naylor, the founding father of this republic in gestation, charged that the U.S. government has “no moral authority . . . it has no soul,” and he denied the salvific properties of the Democratic Party: “It doesn’t matter if Hillary Clinton or Condoleezza Rice [or, you may be sure, Barack Obama] is the next president. The results will be equally grim.”

Rodomontade was kept to a minimum; the gathered had plenty of “what about?” questions. Asked what would become of abortion rights in a Second Vermont Republic, Naylor shrugged and replied, “Whatever the people decide.” The SVR takes no position on abortion, gay rights, gun control, and the like; these are questions to be debated within an independent Vermont. Devolution is the great defuser of explosive issues: Let Utah be Utah, let San Francisco be San Francisco, let Vermont be Vermont.

Naylor grew up in Jackson, Mississippi, but he rocked uneasily in the Confederacy’s cradle. He was a liberal who loved the Ole Miss Rebels but never for a second fell for the myth of happy field hands singing under the hot plantation sun. When a delegate asked the inevitable Civil War question, I expected to see Naylor’s long frame dance around it nimbly. Instead, he met it head-on. “South Carolina and the Confederate states had a perfect right to secede,” he told the assembly, adding that “the bottom line of the Civil War was preserving the Empire.” I expected audible gasps and fainting Unitarians, but the unsayable, having been said, was not confuted.

Would not the empire treat a seceding Vermont...

continued on page 18
Long Live, continued from page 17

with as little forbearance as Lincoln showed South Carolina in 1861? Naylor scoffed: "Would all of the black and white Holsteins be destroyed or perhaps the entire sugar maple crop be burned?"

Maybe they would, Thomas. Certainly the din and clang of war would belch from the cable-news shows and the serious-miened rent-a-scholar who litter them. When Russell Wheeler of the Brookings Institution was asked about Vermont's secession, he scoffed: "If Vermont had a powerful enough army and said, 'We're leaving the union,' and the national government said, 'No, you're not,' and they fought a war over it and Vermont won, then you could say Vermont proved the point. But that's not going to happen."

Those Brookings boys do play a mean game of Risk. Cross 'em and they'll order the working-class and ghetto and barrio kids of the army to wipe your sorry parochial ass off the map. A Brooklyn boy has the answer to Wheeler: The Marxist historian Eugene Genovese, author of the classic Roll, Jordan, Roll, has said that "it is remarkable with what ease so many liberal historians declare that the meaning of the Constitution was settled by the Union victory, for it would be hard to imagine a clearer example of the doctrine that might makes right."

Frank Bryan, introduced by Naylor as "hands down the most interesting person in Vermont . . . since Solzhenitsyn left the state," confessed to being "sad" and "melancholy" because "my nation needs Vermont to secede." Bryan has long been achingly ambivalent about secession. He is, like many decentralists, an American patriot who reveres the crazy old idiosyncratic America and whose heart stirs to patriotic tunes. But something has happened; the country seems to have gotten away from itself. "The reservoirs of citizenry are dried up and that's why we've got to secede," asserted Bryan. (Lest we forget, Bryan reminded us that in many other countries of the world, "we'd be shot for doing what we're doing here today.") Bryan later expanded on these remarks in the pages of the independence-inclined newspaper Vermont Commons. After disposing of the accounting canard that Vermont would come up short if she detached from the federal teat — which isn't true, and besides, the proper answer is So What? — Bryan cut to the heart.

The "best way," he concluded, "to preserve our capacity to live independently is to maintain a government of human scale, where the need to be controlled is balanced by the ability to do some controlling oneself.

"Vermont is such a place.

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

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

"Vermont — the once and future republic — this is where I stand."

Bravo!

The keynote speaker in Montpelier was that common argument that Vermont receives $1.15 for every dollar it sends to Washington and therefore would shortchange itself by separating from the Union, Frank Bryan has replied, "Would you rather have $10,000 to spend any way you want or $11,500 that you have to spend as I say?")

John McClaughry is a thorny original whose work I have long admired, but unless the defining characteristics of "anti-American leftist" are a loathing of Wal-Mart, the Iraq War, and Big Government, and a fondness for organic farming, Town Meeting, and a Vermont First ethic, the SVR seems to me a wholesomely shaggy band of ur-Americans, not anti-Americans. Yeah, I saw a fistful of nuts at the Montpelier convention. I kept a judicious distance from the man who stood to announce that he had once "stuck a fake knife" through his head. There was a collegiate white Rasta or two and a Montreal pwog who informed us that "the U.S. is based on genocide," but they were the sort of free-floating crazies who show up wherever two or more are gathered in the name of revolution. In the main, in the heart, the Second Vermont Republic is based on love: love of a place, of a culture, of an agriculture.

I heard much talk of the need for libertarian conservatives and anti-globalist leftists to work together. There is a sense that the old categories, the old stratjackets, must be shed. When the Reverend Matchstick preaches that we need decentralism because communities that ban genetically modified food must have the power to enforce those bans, he is speaking a language that pre-imperial conservatives will recognize: the language of local control. When the "Vermont nationalist" CEO of a consulting firm insists that Vermont should have the right to determine where (and where not) its national guard is deployed, I hear an echo of the Old Right. Why should the Vermont National Guard be shipped overseas to fight the empire's wars?

"Long Live the Second Vermont Republic and God Bless the Disunited States of America," concluded Thomas Naylor.

You got a better idea? •
How can we light a fire under millions of people, thousands of businesses, and scores of government agencies to adopt efficiency and renewables dramatically faster and transform our energy system?

**Framing the Vision**

The answer starts with a powerful vision. Henry Ford would never have revolutionized transportation without his simple, compelling idea: “I will build a car for the great multitude,” he vowed. John F. Kennedy said, “We choose to go to the moon.” And we did.

*Reinventing Fire’s* vision is equally transformational. We can free ourselves from our Faustian bargain with fossil fuels and create a safer, more efficient, cleaner world. Without such a clear goal in sight, chances are slim that the country will stumble its way into a great energy solution or that we will serendipitously avoid more major missteps. Just look at how every U.S. president since Richard Nixon has vowed to end dependence on imported oil. In actuality, net imports rose to an all-time high of 60% of consumption in 2005 before returning to 49% in 2010.

We need, and have sought to create in *Reinventing Fire*, a clear articulation of what a better energy future looks like, what its benefits are, and how we can overcome the challenges on the way. We must not set our sights too low and underestimate the might of business needs policies that allow and reward what we want, not the opposite. We also should rethink our tax system, because it’s not only baroque verging on rococo, but fundamentally misdirected. If we taxed bad things like pollution rather than good things like jobs and income, as some European countries already do, we could fire the unproductive tons, gallons, and kilowatt-hours and keep employing more people, who then will have more and better work to do.

The previous chapters have laid out the needed reforms and incentives. Now it’s time for our nation’s leaders, at whatever level it takes, to put them in place. And when we say leaders we don’t just mean lawmakers and regulators, nor presidents, tribal leaders, governors, mayors, county commissioners, and city councilors. Business leaders need to embrace the fact that this great prize will remain beyond their reach and ours unless we unleash the opportunity through public-private coordination and effort. For once, both sectors can get what they want: politicians can take credit for trans-ideological appeal and strong results, while business leaders can create enduring value by pursuing private advantage—rather than, as so often in the past, being forced by government mandates to commit unnatural acts in the marketplace.

Once those incentives to choose sensibly exist, watch out! The powerful American engine of innovation, which the 2010 National Security Strategy called a foundation of our nation’s power and leadership, will shift into high gear. It will not only bring new technologies to market but also reshape our ideas of how we use energy. Most astonishing will be what happens as IT meets energy, pervading the energy system with distributed intelligence, ubiquitous sensors, and current information. IT-enriched energy will choreograph the convergence between vehicles, buildings, factories, and electricity sources. It will “transform every individual energy using device from a stand alone single purpose entity into a multipurpose interconnected grid asset that will ultimately optimize the efficiency of the entire energy system,” as FERC Chairman Jon Wellinghoff explains. “It is,” he added, “a revolution that is coming and it will change everything.”

We know where we need to end up. To get there, we need to master six critical challenges. We must together:

- Transform the auto industry. No more obese gas-guzzlers.
- Dramatically reduce the distances traveled by our autos and the haul length, weight, and volume of cargo carried by our trucks. This will come from gradually redesigning our communities and businesses to increase choices, save time and money, and make life easier, healthier, and safer.
- Build efficient buildings and retrofit existing ones on a tremendous scale. Just one energy-efficient building makes a difference. Multiply that by 120 million buildings, and we have a revolution.
- Sustain and accelerate energy savings and cogeneration in industry. Both, and increasingly on-site renewable supplies of heat and electricity, are keys to a durably competitive and resilient future for this engine of the national economy.
- Keep slashing the cost of renewable energy.
- Revamp utilities’ rules and operating models. We will never create a future free of fossil fuels if utilities’ profits depend on how much electricity they sell, or if distributed renewable sources can’t feed electricity into the grid.

**Leading the Change**

Once we have the vision, the next requirement is leadership. If our elected representatives continue to make decisions based on shifting political winds, if special interests keep blocking meaningful reform, if captains of industry shrink from bold steps out of caution, then we’ll get the mediocre energy system we deserve. But we know that America is still a land of leaders. Some politicians understand the need for transformative change, CEOs who bet their company’s future on risky but potentially revolutionary products, and regulators gutsy enough to take on powerful lobbies. We call upon those leaders in business and in government to embrace the vision of *Reinventing Fire*, steer a steady course, and make it happen.

We’ve seen exactly what these leaders must do first. As we’ve described in this book, business is the engine with the power, speed, scope, and scale to drive this energy transformation. But unleashing the might of business requires policies that allow and reward what we want, not the opposite. We also should rethink our tax system, because it’s not only baroque verging on rococo, but fundamentally misdirected. If we taxed bad things like pollution rather than good things like jobs and income, as some European countries already do, we could fire the unproductive tons, gallons, and kilowatt-hours and keep employing more people, who then will have more and better work to do.

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- Revamp utilities’ rules and operating models. We will never create a future free of fossil fuels if utilities’ profits depend on how much electricity they sell, or if distributed renewable sources can’t feed electricity into the grid.
The following excerpt is from The Small-Scale Poultry Flock by Harvey Ussery (Chelsea Green Publishing, 2011).

Why Bother?
Eating with the fullest pleasure—pleasure, that is, which does not depend on ignorance—is perhaps the profoundest enactment of our connection with the world. In this pleasure we experience and celebrate our dependence and our gratitude, for we are living from mystery, from creatures we did not make and powers we cannot comprehend.

—Wendell Berry

Keeping a small-scale flock is almost certain to bring more joy than frustration, is great fun, and requires only minutes in a routine day. Most important from the perspective of this book, the home flock can make a major contribution to the effort to eat better and become more food-independent. But we do have to invest significant effort to set up the project; and we have to see to the flock’s needs every day, even better several times a day, without fail. This serious commitment to living creatures dependent on our care could require significant changes in how we organize our lives. So why bother? Especially when the alternative is so easy and so cheap?

The “Cheap Chicken” Alternative
Eggs and dressed broilers from the supermarket are among the cheapest protein foods you can buy. Indeed, I estimate that my backyard chickens and eggs cost me (considerably) more than I would pay for their equivalents in the supermarket. In order to understand such a peculiar choice, you need to know more about how eggs and dressed broilers are produced in the poultry industry.

As in other areas of modern industrial agriculture, the poultry industry operates on an almost unimaginable scale. Modern broiler houses contain between ten thousand and one hundred thousand birds. A typical one is 20,000 square feet and contains twenty-two to twenty-six thousand growing broilers—less space per bird than the size of a sheet of typing paper. The hapless broilers stand in the deepening accretion of their own manure, which accumulates at the rate of several tons per week in a typical broiler house.

Industrial broilers are highly selected for fastest possible growth to slaughter size. To counteract the stress of living in unsanitary, crowded conditions, broilers eat antibiotics as part of their feed from hatch until slaughter—as early as forty-four days, no later than seven or at most eight weeks. Butchering—of millions of birds per week in a factory-style slaughterhouse—occurs on highly automated “kill lines,” in which key processes, including evisceration, are handled robotically.

Laying hens are even more confined. The typical commercial layer house, which might contain up to a hundred thousand layers, is arranged in a system of stacked tiers, like those in figure 1.1, of battery cages, each about the size of a filing cabinet drawer (67 to 86 square inches per bird—a sheet of typing paper is 93.5 square inches) and holding eight to ten hens, dimly lit by artificial lighting. The hens cannot stretch or even fully stand up, to say nothing of engaging in natural behaviors such as foraging and dust bathing.

Since laying hens under such stress would naturally engage in crazed pecking of one another, chicks who will become layers have half their upper beaks chopped off immediately after hatch—a mutilation known as debeaking that may cause chronic pain. And the male chicks, produced by the hundreds of thousands per day industry-wide, every one of whom is by definition “useless” to the enterprise? They are vacuumed through a series of pipes onto an electrically charged conveyor belt—something like a sausage grinder, minced by high-speed blades, gassed, and handled robotically.

Feeds for industrial poultry are mediocre at best, based on whatever by-products are cheapest on a given day—leather meal from slaughterhouses, soybean meal from oil extraction, cottonseed meal, wheat and other grain bran from flour refinement. Much of the fat content is oil from discarded fast-food deep fryers—which is in the industrial recycling bin to begin with because it is stale. But then all ingredients in the feeds are stale as a result of the heat and pressure of processing, and the resulting damage to the more perishable nutrients.

Food Safety
Every year in the United States 76 million cases of foodborne illnesses occur, leading to about 300,000 hospitalizations and 5000 deaths.

—New York Times, September 4, 2010

In August 2010 the FDA recalled half a billion eggs from supermarket coolers for salmonella contamination. Half a billion! That’s enough to furnish an egg to one out of thirteen people on the planet—an egg that could cause serious food poisoning (and, in the worst case, death). In a single recall. How can anyone trust a production system that has failed so catastrophically its first priority, food safety?

I too was amazed at the numbers—though my amazement was more that the recall was only half a billion. Now that you know the conditions under which industrial eggs are produced, you might join me in wondering why they aren’t all contaminated.

The news is even more grim for eaters of supermarket chicken, who might reflect on salmonella and campylobacter, among the most common sources of foodborne disease (along with E. coli O157:H7). Consumer Reports published the results from a random sampling of fresh supermarket broilers in twenty-two states in the nation. Sixty-six percent of the samples were contaminated, either with salmonella or campylobacter, or both. (Samples from large-scale certified “organic” production were free of salmonella but had a 57 percent contamination rate for campylobacter.) Most of the disease-causing bacteria detected were resistant to at least one antibiotic—the result of the feeding of antibiotics referred to above—so potential infections will likely be more difficult to treat.
News From Chelsea Green Publishing

**Resilience or Sustainability?**

The following excerpt is from *The Transition Companion: Making Your Community More Resilient in Uncertain Times* by Rob Hopkins (Chelsea Green Publishing, 2011).

It might be useful here to reflect on the differences between resilience and sustainability, by way of seeing how Transition sits within the wider sustainability movement. Sustainability underpins much of the environmental movement; its classic definition was created by Gro Harlem Brundtland:

“Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.

This definition has possibly generated more papers, column inches and books than any other. If the time dedicated to debating and arguing over what the term ‘sustainable development’ means had been used to create urban food gardens, we would now have cities resembling an edible version of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. Many people felt the term’s vagueness is, ironically, what led to its widespread support. ‘Sustainable development’ or ‘sustainability’ is often a term used by those arguing for vigorous economic growth, as well as by those who argue that economic growth is suicidal. John Dryzek has wondered whether, as sustainability means many different things to many different people, it should be “dismissed as an empty vessel that can be filled with whatever one likes?”. However, sustainability is founded on the idea that if we can find ways to live within the Earth’s natural capacity, and replenish natural systems rather than deplete them, we can find a level where humanity can live ‘sustainably’ forever. Sustainability puts these concepts of protecting ecological systems alongside the health and well-being of their communities and the need for social justice. However, some argue that peak oil means that sustainability, a stable and steady state, has become redundant.

David Holmgren, the co-originator of the permaculture concept, writes:

“I am suggesting that we need to get over our naive and simplistic notions of sustainability as a likely reality for ourselves or even our grandchildren, and instead accept that our task is to use our familiarity with continuous change to adapt to energy descent”.

Sustainability is about steadiness and the long-term, but peak oil and climate change bring with them the very real possibility of sudden shocks (as we are already starting to see), urgency and a bringing of unpalatable problems into the present. This is where resilience comes in, with its ability to respond to shock.

There is also the observation that sustainability is a good thing, whereas resilience may not be. Sustainability, founded on inclusion, social justice and so on, is a world you would want to wake up in. Resilience on the other hand, could go either way. It refers to the flexibility, the adaptability, the ability to weather difficulties. One can imagine a good resilient community (or at least you will be able to by the end of this book), but also there are past communities that could have been called resilient, but which were oppressive, unjust, divisive and so on. Resilience is not an aspiration on its own, rather it should sit alongside sustainability as a vital extra facet.

Resilience challenges notions of sustainability in terms of being a bolt-on to ‘sustainable’ economic growth. A sustainability consultant in the North West told me of a meeting he had in 2008, just before the oil price spike and the ensuing credit crunch, with a leading local authority. Having read their development plan for the next twenty years, he told them, “Your plan is based on three things: building cars, building aeroplanes and the financial services sector. Do you have anything else up your sleeves?”

Resilience also challenges sustainability when efficiency is considered. For Brian Walker and David Salt, resource efficiency can work against sustainability, given that “the more you optimise elements of a complex system of humans and nature for some specific goal, the more you diminish that system’s resilience”.

Let’s take a supermarket as an example. It may be possible to increase its sustainability and reduce its carbon emissions by using less packaging, using lorries more efficiently, putting photovoltaics on the roof and installing more energy-efficient fridges. However, resilience thinking would argue that the closure of local food shops and food networks that resulted from the opening of the supermarket, as well as the fact that the store only contains a few days’ worth of food – the majority of which has been transported great distances to get there – has massively reduced the resilience of community food security, as well as increasing its oil vulnerability.

Some believe we can move from our current ‘high carbon’ model, where goods are transported great distances, to a ‘low carbon’ information economy, where it is ideas rather than goods that have supported us in the past. Despite the temptation to believe otherwise, we still operate in the physical world with very real and pressing energy and resource constraints. Just because a system is low carbon doesn’t necessarily mean it is resilient.

Walker and Salt are firm in their assertion that sustainability needs to feature an awareness of resilience. “Any proposal for sustainable development that does not explicitly acknowledge a system’s resilience,” they argue, “is simply not going to keep delivering the goods (or services). The key to sustainability lies in enhancing the resilience of social-ecological systems, not in optimising isolated components of the system.”

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The following excerpt is from *Wild Flavors: One Chef’s Transformative Year Cooking from Eva’s Farm* by Didi Emmons (Chelsea Green Publishing, 2011).

**Lemongrass**  
*Cymbopogon citratus* and *Cymbopogon flexuosus*

Lemongrass creates a smooth citrus essence without too much pungency. It melds well with many flavors, such as coconut milk, cilantro, chiles, Thai basil, fish sauce, curry, kaffir lime leaf, and ginger. Recipes most often call for the entire stalk to be added to a soup, stew, or sauce. You generally first cut the stalk into two or three pieces and then whack them with a large knife or the bottom of a heavy pan to release the oils. Some recipes call for the lower third of the stalk, finely chopped, which is added to pan-fried vegetables, stir-fries, meat marinades and pastes, meatballs, rice pilaf, cabbage slaws, and even baked goods like scones.

Lemongrass ice cream is insanely good. Not store-bought, but made from scratch and preferably with the recipe from this book. I once made a large quantity using Eva’s East Indian lemongrass for a fund-raising dinner. The leftover ice cream suffered a thaw, and we refroze it. Still, despite millions of ice crystals, it was so good we ate every drop!

**Lemongrass Ice Cream**

Lemongrass ice cream is especially good when made with the more fragrant East Indian lemongrass. If you can’t find that kind (or don’t grow it yourself), you can substitute West Indian lemongrass, lemon balm, or lemon verbena. You’ll need an ice cream maker for this recipe.

Makes about 5 cups
8 stalks lemongrass or 4 cups loosely packed lemon balm or lemon verbena
3 cups half-and-half
1/2 cup sugar
2 large egg yolks
2 large eggs
1 cup sour cream

1. To prepare the lemongrass, remove the tough outer leaves and use a large, sharp chef’s knife to cut each stalk into 4-inch pieces. Set the lemongrass stalks on a towel on a counter, and lightly pound with a hammer until they have flattened somewhat.

2. Bring the half-and-half to a boil in a medium saucepan over medium heat, adding the lemongrass just as it begins to rise to a boil. Cover, reduce the heat to low, and simmer for 10 minutes. Remove from the heat and let the lemongrass steep for another 30 minutes or so. Pass the half-and-half through a sieve into a bowl, straining out the herb.

3. Whisk together the sugar, egg yolks, and whole eggs in a large saucepan. Slowly whisk in the infused half-and-half. Place the mixture over low heat and cook, stirring continuously with a wooden spoon, until the mixture has thickened to the consistency of eggnog, about 10 or 15 minutes. Be careful not to let it curdle at the bottom. Remove from the heat and whisk in the sour cream. Pour this ice cream base into a container and refrigerate for at least a few hours, until cool.

4. Transfer the mixture to an ice cream maker, and make ice cream according to the manufacturer’s instructions. Once the ice cream is churned, let it harden in the freezer for at least 1 hour before serving.
Local Democracy and the State: Vermont Myths and Realities

Greg Guma

Like a perennial flower that defies climatic change, local control has re-blossomed in Vermont almost every decade since the state's birth. The forces nurturing this perpetually endangered species have changed—from temperance activists and radical populists in the state's early days to peace activists and greens in the 1980s, conservative Republicans in the late '90s and the independence movement of recent years. But it never fails to stimulate the public's political senses—or highlight the distance between image and reality.

The enduring image—some consider it a myth—is that Vermont has a unique democratic heritage tied to traditions like Town Meeting, a citizen legislature, and resistance to centralized power. This is at the root of Vermont's sense of difference, that hard-to-describe attitude sometimes called the Vermont Way. The term has been used to describe everything from the traditional way to make maple syrup and smart farming practice to a political campaign agenda and the ability to make something out of almost nothing. Sometimes it is extended into the phrase "Vermont way of life."

When he left the Republican Party, Jim Jeffords said, "Independence is the Vermont Way." In her autobiography, Consuelo Northrup Bailey, a native Vermonter who was the first female attorney admitted to practice before the U.S. Supreme Court and in 1955 became the first female lieutenant governor in the nation, said the character of Vermont was defined by "everyday, common, honest people who unknowingly salted down the Vermont way of life with a flavor peculiar only to the Green Mountains."

Authors Frank Bryan and John McLaughry tried to define it in The Vermont Papers, their decentralist manifesto: "God-given liberties, their hostility to the central power, whatever it may be, their attachment to their towns and schools and local communities, their dedication to common enterprise for the common good—all these have been among the most cherished Vermont traits, the subject of countless eulogies of Vermont tradition over the years."

That said, the two libertarian thinkers also admitted that reality is something else. While the 1777 Vermont Constitution included some open-government provisions, celebrated the consent of the governed, in theory abolished slavery, and created a comprehensive education system, it also placed considerable power in the hands of the governor and the Governor's Council. It has even been argued, notably by historian Nicholas Muller III, that "early government in Vermont functioned more like an oligarchy than a democracy." Before the State Senate was created, the Council, with the governor, combined the power of an upper legislative chamber with the executive branch.

Today Vermonter elect six statewide officials every two years. Under the original plan there were annual elections for 15 jobs, including the governor, lieutenant governor, treasurer, and 13-member Council. Councilors could simultaneously serve as Supreme Court justices. The result of this system was centralized power and few losses for incumbents, leading to longer tenure in office.

After about nine years, before Vermont became part of the U.S., the original constitution was amended, creating something closer to what exists today—three separate branches of government with distinct powers. But the Governor's Council survived for another half century, and the Council of Censors was retained. This Federalist-inspired holdover from pre-revolutionary days was supposed to somehow oversee both the governor and legislature, making sure that laws were handled properly and the constitution was being followed. If not, the censors could call a convention and propose amendments. Although doubts arose early about how censors were elected, the Council of Censors' vulnerability to partisan control, and some proceedings marked by prejudice, Vermont hung onto this unusual institution until 1870. In its first 40 years, only one of its proposed amendments was ratified, however, and that one denied voting rights to foreign-born citizens until they were naturalized.

According to Ira Allen, there was little support for the constitution anyway. Had it been submitted to the people, he wrote in his history of the state, "it is very doubtful whether a majority would have confirmed it." He should know. Allen was on the Council from the start, along with his brother Heman, trusted associate Thomas Chittenden, Jefferson ally Matthew Lyon, and other Allen associates. This tiny group controlled negotiations with the British during the revolution, the composition of the early Supreme Court, and, for several decades, almost everything that made it through the General Assembly.

On the other hand, Vermont had the tradition of Town Meeting. The roots of the idea went back to England and the Massachusetts Bay Colony, and eventually spread through most of New England. In the days of the Bay Colony, the sense that participation was a social obligation was so great that fines were sometimes imposed for non-attendance. But the crucial business conducted in the 19th century was largely apotiff. For example, residents would gather to select "tything men" to act as the general police, and sometimes also pound-keepers or supervisors—known as "reaves"—who cared for hogs and other animals.

In the early 20th century Town Meeting gained some traction, becoming the main way for local communities to exercise some measure of control over an increasingly broad range of public affairs. At its best, Town Meeting epitomized the value of equititarian democracy. On the other hand, attendance was 20 percent or less in many places, and business was often decided by rural bosses before the formal meeting began. Over time, growth brought increased complexity, while state and federal government assumed more local responsibilities, leaving a ceremonial shell in which the purchase of a truck became "major" business.

Frank Bryan began observing these meetings in the late 1960s. In early analysis, he found that participation was relatively greater in smaller towns, that educational level didn't influence the level of involvement, and increased use of the Australian ballot threatened to kill the tradition. He also talked about the "atomizing" of local authority; basically, the shifting of local functions to various regional groups and the state left towns with little to draw residents each year.

Town Meeting rebounds

In the 1970s, however, a new type of business began to appear on Town Meeting agendas—resolutions that dealt with issues beyond the usual boundaries of local government. In 1976 anti-nuclear activists brought up items that called for the banning of nuclear power plants or the transportation and storage of nuclear waste. People knew the towns had no way to enforce such a decision, and yet by 1977 more than 40 communities took such a stand. In subsequent years a majority of Vermont towns voted for a nuclear weapons freeze—a campaign that gained national recognition by 1982—issuing instructions to the state's congressional delegation to help lead the charge. Federal officials eventually took their advice.

At the time, Bryan and other Town Meeting boosters were concerned that "larger" issues might begin to dominate the annual gatherings and reduce attendance in the long run. In 1974 he had predicted "the functional death of the Vermont town" as rural political systems became "more closed than open, more individualistic than communal, and politically more passive than active." But in a 2004 book, All Those in Favor, he was more optimistic, praising the global impact of local votes on the Nuclear Freeze "because the world knows that town meetings are authentic, democratic governments and Vermont has the healthiest system of this kind of government anywhere."

Pointing to a series of social innovations—from challenging slavery and McCarthyism in the past to leading the national debate on environmental protection and gay marriage in more recent times—Bryan and co-author Susan Clark argued that Town Meeting is the reason Vermont "consistently places better on indices of achievement in the areas of good government, civil society, social capital, collective generosity, and political tolerance." Among their observations: continued on page 24
Local Democracy and the State, continued from page 23

- An average 20 percent of eligible voters attend Vermont town meetings, a more significant figure when you consider the amount of time involved and the fact that voter turnout for local elections across the U.S. is only 25 percent.

- 44 percent of those who attend actually speak, a high number for any legislative process.

- Women fare better than in any other part of the U.S. political system. Less than 20 percent of the Congress is female; in the Vermont Legislature it is around 30 percent. But according to a 2003 study of 44 town meetings, 48 percent of those involved in passing local budgets and setting the tax rate were women.

- The level of participation varies widely. Small towns average more than 30 percent attendance, while only about 5 percent show up in larger communities. It didn’t happen, but the intention was clear: to make it harder for people to raise issues not in favor with elected leaders. It didn’t happen, but the intention was clear: to make it harder for people to raise issues not in favor with elected leaders.

- This dynamic illustrates an inconvenient fact. Although the state has a tradition of local democracy and an accessible citizen legislature, it also has one of the nation’s most centralized governments, due in part to the weakness of county structures. Beyond that – and also contrary to myth – both its citizens and leaders, progressives and conservatives alike, have repeatedly opted to expand the state’s authority in areas ranging from roads and the environment to health and education. Much of what makes Vermont attractive to those bewitched by its image can be traced to the use of state power.

Based on the state’s contemporary image as a liberal stronghold, it is easy to forget that Republicans largely made Vermont what it is today. GOP governors were among the most ardent early proponents of a statewide tax to fund education. Governor Ernest Gibson Jr. said, as early as the late 1940s, that the greatest problem facing Vermont was “equalizing educational opportunity and distributing the costs as equally as possible among the towns and school districts.” Thirty years later, another Republican, Richard Snelling, called for a state-administered property tax to spread the burden between rich and poor towns. The proposal failed when rich towns squealed, while communities that would have come out ahead worried instead about a loss of local control.

**GOP-led consolidation**

Despite such occasional setbacks, Republican leaders had little difficulty embracing centralization for most of the century they dominated Vermont politics. After the Civil War, the issue was state aid to highway programs, designed to help farmers transport their milk. In the early 20th century, under Fletcher Proctor, it was centralization of rural schools and industrial education. Far from being a libertarian, Proctor also supported prohibition, only relenting when a “local option” movement for liquor licensing threatened to overturn GOP rule. Subsequently, he struck a deal with liquor distributors and managed to maintain state control of local license committees.

Republicans were firmly in command when the state stepped into education management, passed and increased the income tax, and established the state highway system after the flood of 1927. In each case, they were accepting reality; namely, that local communities needed outside help. By the 1940s, it was common knowledge that individual towns couldn’t handle all the necessary services properly on their own. In addition to looking at education, Gibson established the State Police and argued that state government should take the leading role in providing for public health and welfare. Although Democrat Phil Hoff was both praised and blamed for expanding state services and power in the 1960s, the stage was actually set by yet another Republican. In the late ’50s, insurance executive Deane Davis chaired the Little Hoover Commission, a reorganization study that called for agency consolidation and more control by the governor. The buzzwords then were simplification and efficiency. A decade later, Davis succeeded Hoff and presided over the formation of the Vermont Agency of Administration and school districts. Thirty years later, another Republican, Richard Snelling, called for a state-administered property tax to spread the burden between rich and poor towns. The proposal failed when rich towns squealed, while communities that would have come out ahead worried instead about a loss of local control.

**This article is adapted from The Vermont Way: Restless Spirits and Popular Movements, a new study of the state’s history, traditions and values that will be published in March 2012.**
I believe that banking institutions are more dangerous to our liberties than standing armies. If the American people ever allow private banks to control the issue of their currency, first by inflation, then by deflation, the banks and corporations that will grow up around the banks will deprive the people of all property—until their children wake up homeless on the continent their fathers conquered.

Thomas Jefferson

The events of the last several years, made possible by the systemic corruption of government, have proved Jefferson to be right...over and over again. Whatever the level of our common and private wealth, it is made significantly less due to the fact that private central banks are the sole issuer of our currency. Moreover, the principal affairs of government are conducted in the board rooms of the Federal Reserve. The private Federal Reserve banks create the money that is lent to the government. Our taxes pay the interest. All our money is debt, owed back to the central banks and the IRS is their private collection agency.

In as much as “government” is, at best, willfully powerless, it has no intention of fighting back. So it is left to us. And so begins Creating Wealth; Growing Local Economies with Local Currencies (New Society Publishers, 2011).

Co-written by Montpelier resident Gwendolyn Hallsmith, founder and executive director of Global Community Initiatives, Creating Wealth may be an indictment of a corrupt system that defends and re-enforces our monolithic bank-debt currency, but it is not an indictment against banking per se. The authors acknowledge that debt money, well utilized, has its place, especially in the local community. Creating Wealth is an example of the authors’ public spiritedness, an effort to show us how to build lifeboats while the Titanic sinks. Bailing out can keep the ship afloat for only so long. And, if you like metaphors: money is the ocean; the Federal Reserve system is the Titanic; and as the money pours into the central banks like the ocean into the Titanic, the flaws are so great, and the capacity to fix the system so limited, that lifeboats are the only answer. Abandon ship. It’s over. Get in the lifeboats.

The ocean/money/wealth is still there. It is all around us. We have to get away from the sinking ship and share it.

The chapters of Creating Wealth are structured in such a way that 1) the reasons and principles behind the various complementary currencies, 2) examples of currencies, and 3) the how-to-put-them-into-action instructions are clearly laid out. The Conclusion and Appendix are particularly good in this regard, and they cap the effort to inspire and lead the way for alternative currencies to succeed in as many places as can benefit from them.

A quote from the Foreword by L. Hunter Lovins lays out what the authors have accomplished. “Growth and profit are key elements of the economy. With this book, Bernard and Gwend demonstrate that far from being a neutral means of exchange, the financial system serves as an almost invisible driver of unnecessary and unhealthy growth—the ideology of the cancer cell. By expanding the diversity of exchanges we can achieve the growth we need—growth in intelligence, health, natural beauty, the arts, spiritual development, recreation and peace—and eliminate the unproductive waste and destruction that now threaten life on earth.”

A quote by Henry Ford in Chapter 2 lays out the seemingly impossible task at hand. “The people must be helped to think naturally about money. They must be told what it is, and what makes it money, and what are the possible tricks of the present system which put nations and peoples under control of the few.”

The authors call us to “... a more comprehensive understanding of wealth and more democratic and resilient wealth creation processes and mechanisms. Most of these alternatives can be initiated at the local level by cities and other organizations. City leaders can play a role in the education, funding and structures required to give us all a voice in the creation of sustainable wealth.”

What we have to start with is our capital. In this case our capital is human, social, institutional, natural, technological and environmental. Locally, I see a great wealth of all these in Montpelier alone. How well they are utilized is for you to decide; think of Vermont Compost, ORCA Media, the Kellogg Hubbard Library, the Statehouse, the music venues, the river, the parks, the Savoy Theatre...Creating Wealth makes it clear that the more of these forms of capital we have, the more we can use them in the kinds of exchanges that create real wealth. To be even more specific, wealth is bicycles, horses, donkeys, free range chickens, Jerusalem artichokes, fruit trees, fish, deer, clean water, well-kept roads and infrastructure, care for those in need, food sovereignty, profitable farms...It does not necessarily require bank-debt money to create wealth. It takes an opening up to the possibilities, and the desire to free oneself from the beast.

“We are the authorities...”

The first few paragraphs of this review point out the distant enemies of real wealth and of local control and currencies. These enemies are usually governments that operate on behalf of the banks. Hallsmith and Lietaer write, “Wherever complementary currency systems become successful, political and ideological strings are pulled in order to eliminate this ‘competition’ by making them illegal.”

There are local enemies as well. They are ignorance, selfishness, and the widely held belief that we have no right and no need to mess with “authority.” The authors point out that we are the authorities, and that we can come together to make our own region a better place, and in so doing, make the planet a better place. They advocate practices that are “life-enhancing money to promote more harmony among all the different inhabitants of the Earth.” Through the commerce of ideas as well as goods, the authors advocate communication, inclusion, and reaching out to the farthest corners of the globe. Ethan Allen says this rather well: “...we are the bartering commodities for the convenience and happiness of each nation, they may reciprocally exchange such part of their customs and manners as may be beneficial, and learn to extend charity and good will to the whole world of mankind.” (From A Narrative of Colonel Ethan Allen’s Captivity).

What does all this grandiosity have to do with complementary currencies? The problems that complementary currencies can solve are too many to detail in this review, but let me describe a scenario that any city can face, and how a complementary currency (or basket of them) can solve the problem.

Page 207: “The pressure of higher insurance rates, labor costs and regulations, increased shipping costs and the lack of economies of scale push more and more small businesses into the failed column every year. When this happens, local municipalities are continued on page 26
left with a lower revenue base, which in turn drives up taxes, the costs of water and sewer fees and road maintenance for the local population. When their low-income residents can’t pay, municipal officials have few alternatives except to discontinue services or initiate tax sales on properties.

“After all exchanges facilitated through conventional money have been completed, there remain clearly a variety of unmet needs . . . and at the same time there are underutilized resources available that could meet those needs. Complementary currencies allow localities and regions to link such unmet needs with unused resources and thereby create additional wealth in the local economy.”

The exchanges implied above can be as simple as barter: the plumber needs some compost, and Vermont Compost needs a new water line; you need your dog walked and your friend needs help with her math homework. These goods and services can become data entries in a community-wide or even statewide complementary currency system.

Towns can participate in this system, too, by accepting labor, goods, and complementary currencies as payment for fees – but to my knowledge, none do. The state could accept complementary currencies – but it will not, claiming that they violate the constitutional prohibition against bills of credit. I say pooh.

A map to “local”
From my work in this field, I am well aware that there are many opportunities for the creation of wealth in Vermont, using complementary currencies or bank-debt money, that have not been tapped. When the reason given by those in “authority” is that there is no money, then that is the time to get together with your community and come up with a currency that will work. Those who have worked in this area, such as Gary Flomenhoff, Gaelan Brown, John Ford, Gwen Hallsmith, Alison Underhill, Abe Collins, Matt Cropp, Michael Fisher, Ellen Brown, Amy Kirchner, are all “human resources” that the state and the towns could tap into if they wished. But since politicians are challenged in the realms of public spirit and courage, I appeal to the rest of you to read *Creating Wealth*, and then to contact one of us. We have also produced a television program, now a DVD, called, *Creating Wealth, Economic Resilience for the State of Vermont* that you may have at cost.

In case you would like more evidence as to the connections between federal reserve notes and life as we know it, here is a notable point from John Maynard Keynes from the book’s Conclusion: “Bank-debt money would have disappeared many years ago if it weren’t for the fact that governments require all taxes and fees to be payable only in that particular currency.”

That is the corruption inherent in the system.

The obvious question is, why do so many honorable people in government buy into a bank-debt, tapeworm economy? Why indeed, when the solution is to accept some taxes in a complementary currency? If your city had an interest in getting such a currency into circulation, it would need merely to accept it as a tax payment. That would be both the engine and the wheel to allow us to hang onto more of those precious bank-debt dollars, and to accomplish so much more in our communities. But not only do they refuse to accept it – they tax it! Which discourages it even more. Perhaps politicians and the rest of us confuse wealth with money.

In *Creating Wealth*, the authors have laid out the reasons for using complementary currencies, and also the reasons why these currencies are so limited in scope, particularly in the U.S. They are plentiful, but carefully and necessarily designed to have limited but targeted effect. Even limited, the rewards of these complementary currencies are in stark contrast with the travesties perpetrated by the banksters and their governments. We are, at this time in history, by definition, vassals. We are ruled and taxed from afar. Our treasures are plundered and our people are sent off to plunder elsewhere. We are living in the period of neo-feudalism. How do we simple folk like it?

I applaud Ms. Hallsmith and Mr. Lietaer for ringing the alarm and providing a map for anyone to follow. And I continue to be amazed by the lack of attention that alternative currencies have received, given their successes. This book will help.

The truth is, either we do not understand money, or we are happy to work for the banksters. We have allowed con artists, snake-oil salesmen, criminals, and mass murderers to control our lives, when all we have to do is opt out of their financial clutches. If we don’t cast them off now, then when? •
Home Share Now is a nonprofit based in Barre, with a satellite office in Morrisville. Its mission is to help create affordable housing options for people in central Vermont, with positive community and environmental impacts, by matching appropriate home-sharing partners. Home Share Now works in Washington, Orange, and Lamoille counties; it has a staff of six, supported by a dozen volunteers. Christina Goodwin, of Worcester, is its associate director.

Home. Share. Now... Explain how these three words connect in the work your organization does.

Christina Goodwin: Home Share Now matches people and homes in a way that is mutually beneficial. The specifics of any home share are as unique as the people involved. Matches share in a variety of ways to include both the cost and the work associated with housing -- including house chores, gardening, and meals. The magic of home sharing is that by way of these shared experiences comes a relationship; for some it feels like companionship and for others it feels like friendship, and for some it feels like family.

For seven years we operated as Home Share of Central Vermont, but that name didn’t convey the urgency, the need to do something now to address the challenges of today’s reality. The world is in a precarious place, economically, emotionally, and environmentally. The first baby boomers have qualified for Social Security, an undeniable harbinger of a rapidly aging population. Affordable housing, already scarce in central Vermont, blossomed into a crisis with the national economic meltdown in late 2008. The economic reality is inspiring many folks to reevaluate their lifestyles. Environmental concerns, increased awareness of the scarcity of “easy” oil, and evidence of climate change, have highlighted the need to explore more sustainable choices. Home sharing can provide a piece of the puzzle to build a more holistic response to these challenges. And the time is now: Home Share Now.

How did you come to work in this organization?

C.G.: The staff of six and the team of over a dozen volunteers certainly bring with them a shared love of people and their stories. We’re collectively fascinated by all the ways in which people carry out their lives, how they choose to bring ideas and passions into fruition. I would also say that the staff of Home Share Now certainly understands the power of home – the place where dreams and ideas are born, and also the vessel in which rest and regeneration take place. And we understand the importance of interpersonal relationships and the inner strength and happiness that comes when people feel cared about, when people feel important, when people feel supported.

Owning a home is the ultimate expression of the “American Dream,” in the minds of many Americans. Is Home Share Now suggesting that we need to rethink this notion?

continued on page 29
“Leaner. Greener.”

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C.G.: It seems that we as a culture are increasingly pushed to rethink the “American Dream” as the world around us changes. People, in some ways, have become really fragmented and isolated despite the increasing ways that technology “connects” folks. A strong culture is one that is interconnected in intimate ways, in the same way that the strongest ecosystems are interconnected. Sharing living space allows people to share both small and big events, meals, work, problem solving, passionate conversation, and increased sense of empathy for those around us. While it is easy to get philosophical and big-picture about the benefits of home sharing, the simple fact that people can lead happier, simpler, and supported lives is big enough.

Home Share Now isn’t the only one rethinking. The people are asking for other options, too. In 2008 we experienced a 56-percent increase in requests; in 2009 the requests rose another 66 percent, and in 2010 we saw another 84-percent increase in requests.

Who are likely candidates here in Vermont to participate in Home Share Now?
C.G.: Folks that fall into the “likely candidates” category has certainly changed over time. In the beginning we served mostly elders and folks who were financially insecure, or folks in transition – and while we still serve these folks we are also serving a greater diversity of people who are helping redefine the benefits of home sharing. Benefits can include home-cooked meals, transportation sharing, collective purchasing, reduction of housing expenses, shared heating costs, companionship, the ability to travel and leave pets cared for at home, an exercise buddy, an extended family, an overnight protective presence, a smaller environmental impact, someone to shovel the front walk, a gardening companion, or a great strategy for building community. This past year we facilitated our first match that included cows. We’d like to make more matches including cows.

How many Home Share Now projects are you currently facilitating in Vermont?
C.G.: We’re currently working with about 80 individuals; about half of these folks are currently in matches. Thus far in our history we’ve facilitated over 400 introductions and placed 326 people in matches.

What are some of the biggest challenges and rewards involved in your Home Share Now work?
C.G.: The biggest challenge is that home sharing isn’t one size fits all, so every person that walks in the door or calls on the phone brings with them a different story. And this dynamic environment is also a huge reward and allows us the benefit of working with all walks of life.

By far the greatest reward is the stories. Home Share Now is helping people be where they want to be, whether that means living a life of minimal impact or allowing an elder to spend as long as possible in the home where they raised children, surrounded by the things they’ve spent a lifetime collecting. The best stories are those from our participants that start with “I never expected...” because home sharing and its benefits take people by surprise. The latest sentiment I heard was “I didn’t expect that home sharing would be this great. I didn’t expect to find a friend.” Another recent match check-in used a triple “love” to describe how she felt about her home share. Warm fuzzies abound.
Lesson #1: Pollution—bad; clean air, water and forests—good. Scientists know that the earth's climate has changed, and changed back again, over its gazillion-year history, but by and large they believe human activities (emissions of various types — or, you might say, pollution) are exacerbating the changes we're seeing today. Suffice it to say, therefore, that pollution is bad.

Lesson #2: Our current energy sources pollute the earth a lot. And we are running out of the stuff, so it's getting expensive. Expensive stuff is bad for people, but good for the companies that sell the stuff.

Lesson #3: Good news! We have renewable energy technology that can produce clean energy that is actually less expensive than the true cost of the stuff we're running out of! Clean is good. Less expensive is good for people, but bad for the companies that sell the expensive stuff we're running out of.

Lesson #4: Our "leaders" on both "sides" of the national political spectrum get paid a lot of money by the companies that sell us the high-polluting, expensive stuff that we're running out of. These leaders do what they are told by the people who pay them, just like you or I would. Then they talk a lot about divisive social issues to keep us distracted from their corruption and industry payoffs. Division and corruption are bad.

Lesson #5: These "leaders" spend more than $1 trillion of our tax dollars per year on weapons of mass destruction and military bases to control foreign supply lines of the stuff we're running out of, to make sure the companies that sell the stuff continue to make a lot of money, so that the companies can keep giving the leaders their payoffs. Mass destruction is bad. Payoffs are bad.

Any questions? Okay, class dismissed.

Lessons #1 and #2 above are pretty obvious to most people. Lesson #3 has become much more obvious lately, but lots of people still get this question wrong on the quiz. But it's lessons #4 and #5 that are the most important when looking at the "climate change" political movement.

Look, all kidding aside, fossil fuels are only going to get more expensive since we are beyond global peak oil production, (according to the International Energy Agency and the U.S. military). Since the U.S. is competing for that dwindling supply with rapidly growing nations like China, Brazil, and India, prices will be pressed upward even more.

The International Energy Agency (IEA) predicts that 2011 global demand for oil will be 90 million barrels per day, while global production will only supply 87.5 million barrels per day. This is why Obama and the IEA recently agreed to release 60 million barrels from the strategic petroleum reserve, because any kind of long-term supply gap puts the global economy into recession or depression.

So why do we need "climate change" as political motivator to inspire investment in non-polluting, affordable, domestic renewable energy systems? Why have carbon emissions been the focus, when economic sustainability and environmental sustainability is what the people across the political spectrum want? Why did Al Gore do nothing about clean energy when he was vice president for eight years, even though he's been talking about global warming since 1970?

I suggest that the answer to these questions may be logically deduced when you review lessons #1-#5 and realize that none of the major U.S. or global climate-change political organizations or leaders ever mention the fact that the U.S. military is the world's largest consumer of fossil fuels and the world's largest air polluter.

Why should the government enforce a carbon tax on U.S. businesses, when simply eliminat-
ing the emissions and economic dead weight of the military would reduce the problem more than anything else possibly could? Without the burden of the U.S. military budget, we would have plenty of investment capital for the U.S. to become energy independent with renewable technologies.

Regardless of how dramatic climate change may actually become, any attempt at complex regulation or carbon taxation will undoubtedly become another bureaucratic black hole like everything else the corrupt U.S. government hands us.

Environmentalists and progressives need to recognize this sad truth and focus on the real obstacle to sustainability and social justice: THE U.S. MILITARY.

Sustainability and conservation should not be political ideologies that divide us. These are merely elements of sound, long-term economic strategy.

Climate change is effectively a wedge issue that distracts us and keeps us dependent on the fossil fuel industry while the “science” debates rage on endlessly. A logical deduction would be that this is a classic Hegelian dialect where the power elite funds both sides of the debate, using social issues to keep us divided (through Al Gore on one side, Rush Limbaugh on the other), keeping tight control of the theatre, while the oil companies and military contractors rake in record profits.

U.S. military costs of more than $1 trillion are in large part a direct subsidy to the fossil fuel industry, and the rest can accurately be categorized as socialism for defense contractors that needed growth markets in the post-Cold War era. The dead weight that the Pentagon budget represents is a stupefying slap in the face to each of us, regardless where on the political spectrum we fall.

Small-government Republicans and Libertarians should shudder in disgust at the enormous waste of money and the mountain of debt this has caused our nation. Democrats, environmentalists, and social progressives should cringe at their own hypocrisy for continuing to pay federal taxes that enable the military to be the single-largest polluter on planet Earth.

But instead, right wingers push back on big-government carbon-tax schemes, while questioning the science of climate change. And left wingers focus on carbon and light bulbs instead of domestic, affordable clean energy. Round and round the climate-change Merry-go-Round we go.

Vermont’s annual share of the military budget, $1.5 billion, is about the same amount that Vermont spends on public education or healthcare. This amount of money would also cover the cost of making 75,000 Vermont homes 100-percent powered by the sun.

Climate science is complicated and hard to understand. But the math related to the cost of the U.S. military empire is pretty straightforward. Hey Bill McKibben, Rush Limbaugh, and Al Gore: Please email me at gaelanb@gmail.com if you’d like a math lesson on the cost of empire, free of charge.

U.S. military costs of more than $1 trillion are in large part a direct subsidy to the fossil fuel industry, and the rest can accurately be categorized as socialism for defense contractors.
I don’t know who discovered water, but I’m pretty sure it wasn’t a fish.

Marshall McLuhan

In a new Vermont can we level the inequities that women still endure?

To be sure, in the past century women have gained ground. Women have gained the right to vote and the right to hold office. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 forbids employment discrimination based on sex. The law grants women equal pay for equal work – but women still receive less pay for doing the same work. Nine years after Vermont’s pay-equity law was enacted, and nearly 50 years after President John F. Kennedy signed into law the original “Equal Pay Act,” women in Vermont still make 81 cents for every dollar a man earns doing the same job.

The University of Vermont Board of Trustees has 25 seats. Seven (28 percent) are occupied by women. The Vermont State Colleges Board has 15 seats. Five (33 percent) are occupied by women. In the 2009-2010 legislative biennium women accounted for only a third of the Vermont Legislature. Why?

In Vermont, as in all other states, there is a lingering cultural subordination of women. Our laws forbid discrimination against women and yet it flagrantly persists.

Is there any reason to hope or expect that an independent Vermont would alter this? Our state history isn’t encouraging. In 1920, when the 19th Amendment – the Women’s Suffrage Amendment – was presented to the Vermont Legislature for ratification, it was rejected. In the following year, after the necessary three-fourths majority of the states had ratified it, and Vermont women had already voted in a presidential election, Vermont limped into compliance and voted for ratification.

Our cultural subordination of women expresses itself through different expectations we have of women than men. When President Obama nominated Elena Kagan to the Supreme Court last year, her personal life gained a swarm of media attention. At the time of her nomination, Kagan was 50 years old and had never married or had children. News outlets nationwide latched onto this information and ran with it for weeks, speculating about her sexual orientation, insinuating that something was wrong with her. The fact that she didn’t have a husband or children somehow made her suspect, notwithstanding her sterling legal credentials. Contrast that with the nomination of Justice David Souter, who was confirmed only 20 years earlier. He was a 51-year-old bachelor: No public fuss about his lack of family; no inquiry into his romantic life, no questions about his sexual orientation. The difference between the way we scrutinized them wasn’t visible to most of us because it was, and is, entwined with our fundamental customs. We are like fish trying to see water.

Men enjoy an unspoken advantage of dominance. But male dominance isn’t law; it’s custom. The custom of male dominance begins with the very first legal act in our lives – the filing of our birth certificate, which is the official record of the name of our father’s father, his father’s father, and his father’s father ad infinitum. But within three generations the identity of our mother’s lineage disappears into murky uncertainty.
of our legal name. In Vermont, most married people who have children follow the centuries-old custom for naming their children. The custom is called patrilineage. It is a system in which one belongs to one’s father’s family and is given the father’s surname as the family name. There is no law that compels us to choose our father’s family name. Nevertheless, the first legal act of our lives subordinates our identity to our male parent. It is a custom, not a law. In Vermont women, and only women, advance the custom — because only the mother, if she survives childbirth, has the legal authority to name the child.

There is another situation where patrilineage is advanced by women: marriage. There is no law that compels a woman to adopt her husband’s name when she gets married. But 90 percent of women in the United States take their husband’s name when they marry. In a single moment a woman discards the most fundamental aspect of her identity, her name, and subordinates herself to her spouse by adopting his name. A prominent 19th century abolitionist and suffragist, Lucy Stone, succinctly wrote, “A wife should no more take her husband’s name than he should hers.” Nevertheless, most women do so willingly and often happily. Women voluntarily choose to subordinate their identity to their husbands. It is a decision to forfeit their claim to lineage.

However, it is the custom of naming of children for the father that raises more complicated questions regarding lineage. We know the surname of our father, our father’s father, his father’s father, and his father’s father ad infinitum. But, within three generations the identity of our mother’s lineage disappears into the murky uncertainty of memory and scattered records. From the moment of our birth our biological mothers are a proven fact. Absent a DNA test, our fathers are always an unproven belief. Legally, it would be more accurate to say that children are given the name of their presumed father. When a man and a woman are married, the husband is by law presumed to be the biological father. But, the legal presumption of fatherhood is not the same as the fact of fatherhood. Logically, naming children with their mother’s name supports the biological integrity of lineage, while naming them for the father does not.

So, can we change Vermont by altering our naming conventions? Not instantly. However, one important fact would change: We wouldn’t subordinate to male identity from the time we are born. We would be members of our mother’s families rather than our father’s, and mothers would be regularly considered the “head” of the family.

As a male, I’m perfectly happy looking at the water the way a fish does, and not see it. I have no incentive to change our naming custom. I don’t object to carrying my father’s identity forward, and if I had sons I wouldn’t object to my name being carried by their progeny. I would encourage daughters to retain my name too. As a male, I only have the power of encouragement.

That’s the name game. Women, and only women, have the legal power to change the rules. What’s stopping you? You don’t have to wait for Vermont independence and you don’t need anyone’s permission.
Transition Towns are inventing the model as we go along. We are trying to transform our communities, which are tremendously dependent on fossil fuels and the international economy, into ones that can continue to provide a high quality of life while fuel prices spike and the economy sputters. We’re aware of no modern community that has ever made that transition.

“IT’S STRUCK ME HOW DIFFERENT TRANSITION LOOKS IN ALL THE DIFFERENT PLACES. PEOPLE ARE TAKING IT AND MAKING IT THEIR OWN, PLAYING ON THEIR STRENGTHS. THAT’S VERY INSPIRING.” —EMILY HARDT

Particularly when you’re doing something that’s never been done before, it’s helpful to get feedback from someone who can step back a little and put things in perspective. So when Emily Hardt kept showing up at Transition Town Montpelier events, with notepad and voice recorder, I asked her to talk about what lessons she was learning that could help us.

Hardt is working on her Ph.D. dissertation in political science at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. She’s not really an outsider to Transition Towns; she spent a year starting Transition Somerville (Mass.) before focusing her academic studies on the movement. Still, the Ph.D. program has given her an outsider’s perspective. She is studying the Transition Town movement in the northeastern U.S., with some locales in Massachusetts and Vermont as her case studies so far.

In the classification scheme of social movements, Hardt said, Transition Towns are called “prefigurative”; that is, they follow Gandhi’s dictum to “be the change you want to see in the world.” In that way, they are similar to the Zapatista movement in Chiapas, Mexico, or the World Social Forum movement. “The Zapatistas are trying organized non-hierarchically, cultivating leadership at the grassroots. Likewise, the World Social Forum has people own the process, trying to live out the values of democracy and self-organization.” The U.S. feminist and civil rights movements organized in similar ways, she said.

In the Transition Towns she has visited, Hardt said, being the change you want to see has brought in people who have never previously been orga-
nationalized politically around energy or climate issues. “There’s an emphasis on very practical projects, such as building gardens, growing food, or creating compost. People don’t have to wait for anyone else before they can get started. They don’t have to deliberate, meeting upon meeting, before they can get their hands dirty.”

When asked to describe a Transition Town project she’s excited about, Hardt referred to Wayland, Massachusetts, where the Transition Town just started in April. The town is criss-crossed by paths that had been public rights of way, but they’ve become overgrown and disused. The Transition Town is clearing the paths and using them both to tell town history – how the paths were used in the past – as well as to identify the plants along the paths.

In Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts, the Transition project that struck Hardt as most exciting is deliberation, but it’s deliberation that brings the community together over issues they have not previously discussed – ongoing community conversations about rising food and fuel prices and how to respond.

Although the Transition Handbook provides a model for how to do Transition, Hardt said, “It’s struck me how different it looks in all the different places. People are really taking it and making it their own, playing on their strengths. That’s very inspiring.”

I asked her if she had found any community that had reached a sort of tipping point, by which I meant where the idea of working together for greater self reliance had become mainstream. She pointed immediately to Montpelier, and added that she was just getting to know Putney and is impressed with what she is seeing there. “What you guys have done here (in Montpelier), in terms of the level of engagement with the working groups and the different kinds of projects going on, the diversity in that, is pretty remarkable.”

Hardt characterized her research as “just beginning” and urged me to “stay tuned” for her findings.

If you have a Transition Town story that you wish to invite Emily Hardt to include in study, contact her at emilyhardt@gmail.com.
Late summer and already I can feel it. I feel it mostly at the fringes of each day, like a photo with its edges slightly out-of-focus. The mornings are cool now, and darker, and in the evenings I look up from the task at hand to find the sun already dropping behind the Greens and everything disappearing into the wash of night. Fall. Not quite yet, but soon.

And winter, inevitably to follow.

I am more energized now than at any other time of year, including spring. Paradoxically, as the nights get longer, I awake earlier and earlier, frequently soft-stepping down the stairs to find that it is only 3:00 or 3:30 and then soft-stepping back up to try to lull myself back to sleep for another hour or two. I lie there and listen to my family breathing, the dog softly snoring, the early, bedraggled crows of Brutus, our rooster. I lie there and watch the stars, and rather than wonder at how big the universe is, I find myself amazed by how small it seems. Because doesn't it look like if you really tried, you could reach up and grab one of those suckers?

I used to find it strange that it feels like I am opening at the precise time of year when nature is closing. It is as if I am absorbing the energy being shed by the trees in our forest, the grasses in our fields, and the animals we slaughter, their blood soaking into the dun-colored soil of our barnyard, their entrails buried deep in the compost pile, where they’ll succumb to the same process that will eventually take us all. Only to be spread across our fields or atop the raised beds of our crops, bringing all those little shoots to life. Our animals are generous; they don’t know how to stop giving.

It is only when I allow myself to see the larger picture that it all makes sense. We tend to categorize these things – this season is for that, that season is for this – but of course it is all part of the same balled-up, interconnected, cyclical nature of things. We think of spring as the season of renewal, but forget that nothing can be renewed without something having been taken. And so the taking, the dying, and the shedding are all parts of the renewal, no less crucial than the early tender suckles of a newborn calf.

There is so much talk lately of collapse, of the vulnerability inherent to the complex and convoluted systems that, like it or not, we are all dependent on. But I sometimes wonder if we’re thinking about it all wrong. For what is it we’re afraid of collapsing? A financial system that funnels profits to the top single percent? An energy supply that enables such false prosperity and wreaks such widespread havoc? Perhaps the true collapse was in the creation of, and our subsequent dependence on, these systems. Perhaps what we bear witness to, in the early years of the 21st century, is nothing less than the early-stage societal composting necessary to feed the cycle. We have all fed well (though obviously, some better than others) off the meat of these arrangements, and now it is time to bury them with all the guts and shit and detritus of our nation.

Now it is time for renewal.
Perhaps Collapse: Do Nothing

Jasmine Lamb

Just as a gardener may enrich her soil with compost, lime, and minerals, or plant a cover crop of peas and oats, we too need to tend to our inner lives by cultivating the conditions from which we can spaciously listen and grow. Our lives depend on this earth. And the earth depends on our caring not only for the soil beneath our feet, but also the soil of our beings.

Life grows in the earth when there are the right conditions in the soil. Making rich topsoil is work that is deeply underappreciated in our culture. We think broccoli grows at the supermarket and that we can have deep inner awareness by following the latest seven-step program.

Zen priest Kosho Uchiyama writes in his book, Opening the Hand of Thought: Foundations of Zen Buddhist Practice, “There’s an old saying: ‘The poor farmer makes weeds, the mediocre farmer makes crops, and the skilled farmer makes soil.’ I have spent my life trying to improve the soil, or practice ground, where I practice.”

Yesterday, rain all day. Today, brilliant sun, deep blue sky. I dig in my friend’s garden. Turning over the dirt to prepare a bed. The soil is workable. Your soil is workable. Our life is workable.

It may not always seem as though this is true; it may seem as if life is too much, too confusing, challenging, painful, and difficult. And yet, still something is present that can be worked with, can be strengthened and nourished.

It is difficult to grow vegetables in clay soil; it is too hard and stiff and the water runs right off of it. It is equally challenging to cultivate plants in sandy soil where the moisture runs right through it. But even if our own inner soil is mostly clay or sand, or has been being trodden on, cemented over, neglected – still, underneath is dirt and life and we can work with it. We can add compost and love and over time something new will begin to grow there.

We are the earth. We won’t heal the earth by beating her up or chastising her, nor will we heal ourselves this way. The earth is not wrong or bad and nor are we.

But to heal the earth, and ourselves as part of the earth, does take attention and determination. It requires perseverance and being willing to face and understand what isn’t necessarily comfortable, easy, or popular. It means shifting our gaze from seeing the earth or ourselves as something apart, that can be manipulated and controlled and used to fulfill our small ideas of what we want and who we are, to the horizon of depth where

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we are willing to, with great loving kindness, be present with ourselves and this earth as it is.

This takes not force, but strength. It asks you to trust with all your heart that you will be able to handle what you see and feel and hear and you will know when you have experienced enough and need to stop and rest.

Recently I visited Green Gulch Zen Center. It is on the California coast right outside San Francisco. Along with being a Zen center, Green Gulch is also an organic vegetable farm.

At one time in my life I had lots of opinions about Zen being strict and difficult and authoritarian. I don’t hold these opinions any longer. Opinions come and go. At Green Gulch I felt enormous gratitude for the work and lives of the people around me. I could feel the care and awareness in how the structures are built and maintained and how the gardens are tended and the food is cooked. One can go to a resort and find everything clean and trimmed, but it still may not have presence. Green Gulch hums with appreciated life.

When I first began a meditation practice I felt embarrassed about it. I didn’t tell anyone for months that I was sitting. I think I thought other people would see it as a sign of desperation, because I saw it as a sign of desperation. My life seemed out of control and nothing I tried seemed to be fixing this. Coming to meditation truly felt like a last-ditch effort, or even a failure on my part. I might get more support and benefit from doing nothing than from all my attempts to do something.

I felt ashamed. I knew it didn’t really make sense to feel ashamed that I was starting a practice of sitting; wise people have been meditating for thousands of years and it is considered a sane activity by most. The truth is, the sitting practice wasn’t creating the shame – it was just revealing it. Slowly I became more accepting of my sitting practice, or more accepting of myself. In time I began to share this part of my life with my friends and family, and even on occasion sit with other people at a retreat center or community meditation center.

During my few days at Green Gulch I felt renewed joy and appreciation for sitting – just sitting, nothing else to do. And also found such support and encouragement in sitting with others. The physical presence of everyone else in the zendo filled me with energy to be there alone with myself, intimate with my experience, while at the same time feeling this great connection to everyone else.

Suzuki Roshi, founder of the Green Gulch Zen Center, wrote, “Our tendency is to be interested in something that is growing in the garden, not in the bare soil itself. But if you want to have a good harvest the most important thing is to make the soil rich and to cultivate it well.”

Much is perilous in this world of ours and everything seems to want our attention. Consider taking a step back, widening your gaze, and doing nothing. See what grows from this fertile ground.
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Is it just a faulty memory in my advancing age, or was there a time when the American university was the home of the dissenter, the free-thinker, the skeptic, even the iconoclast? Not all the disciplines, not all the faculty, but wasn’t there an academic tradition, beyond that of conserving the canon, of calling into question the accepted, the norm, of stretching the edges of the disciplines to find something new and unexpected, of challenging orthodoxy and the Establishment?

That may have been a Romantic fantasy, but I did feel enough of that spirit in my college days some years ago that I ended up leading a demonstration of 3,000 students against the president of the university and his increasingly oppressive policies on sexual behavior and drinking, and his increasing usurpation of powers traditionally given to the faculty and the undergraduates. It was a few years before the upheavals at Berkeley and the student-power demonstrations on campuses coast to coast in the 1960s, but it was all of a part of that growing feeling of rebellion and challenge that marked that decade and several to follow.

But I venture to say it exists no longer.

I came to be thinking about this when I was wondering, a while ago, why it is that the current movement discussing the issues of secession and raising temperatures of the university and his increasingly oppressive policies on sexual behavior and drinking, and his increasing usurpation of powers traditionally given to the faculty and the undergraduates. It was a few years before the upheavals at Berkeley and the student-power demonstrations on campuses coast to coast in the 1960s, but it was all of a part of that growing feeling of rebellion and challenge that marked that decade and several to follow.

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I came to be thinking about this when I was wondering, a while ago, why it is that the current movement discussing the issues of secession and raising temperatures of the American republic, particularly when the American republic today would be the last place in the world that would be critical of the American empire, much less interested in breaking it up. Because it has become the creature of that empire, a handmaiden and lackey of its bidding. It gets much of its funding (approximately $60 billion a year, including student grants) from the government, its research is heavily directed toward the needs of Washington (and especially the Pentagon), its faculties are intertwined with federal agencies (as in Larry Summers-isn), and insofar as academia may be said to have a philosophy these days it would be a Marxist-tinged liberalism that falls into unthinking support for big government, and the bigger the better.

So I guess I could hardly expect any enthusiasm for secession from that quarter. Universities being a part of the empire, they bred, and demand, support for it.

It’s sometimes easy to forget just how enormous the American university system is. There are 5,758 institutions of higher education in the U.S. – the second-largest number only to India (with a population four times as large) at 8,407 – that works out to an incredible 113 per state. The total number of students according to the Department of Education in 2007 was 18,248,128, the highest number by far in the world (India, second, has only six million). The number of teachers, full-and part-time, is more than 50,000; the number in administration positions is unknown but is thought to be half again as many. All in all, the university system is a major institution in American society.

And a major influence. It is not too much to say that in fact it is an equal partner in the military/industrial/academic complex that essentially runs the country. (I read recently of a military/industrial/ Congressional complex, but that’s silly. Congress funds what corporations tell it to; it doesn’t run anything.) And it continues to expand its role and power, getting extraordinarily fat tuition money every year, up by a rate calculated at 41 percent higher than inflation over the last 20 years, at a total of what is now close to $300 billion a year. (Harvard, for example, now charges $37,000 annually, only a little more than what 20 percent of American students are charged.) And every year it gets more money from the government, now paying more than 60 percent of university research and development costs ($52 billion in 2008).

What nobody likes to talk about, but which seems increasingly obvious, is that all this academic affluence is a bubble that will eventually burst, and probably sooner. Because it is more and more obvious that most of this pile of money has nothing to do with education, and is not spent on teachers’ salaries and increasing teaching staff – at the same time that it’s more and more obvious that having an expensive college education doesn’t guarantee a job, much less a job that earns enough to pay off that expense. A college degree – particularly since there are so many of them, and many inflated and undeserved – no longer means so much in the job market.

But while the bubble lasts the American academy will continue its position of power and influence in this society, and it will continue its role of conditioning and indoctrinating the young minds in its care – all 18 million of them a year – to have a deep and abiding belief in the singular virtues of the American republic, particularly when the Democrats are in power. They will teach (as their students have been rote-taught to believe) that it is one nation indivisible, even at 310 million people over 3.5 million square miles, and that it would be unpatriotic to question its legitimacy. And a major influence. It is not too much to say that in fact it is an equal partner in the military/industrial/academic complex that essentially runs the country. (I read recently of a military/industrial/ Congressional complex, but that’s silly. Congress funds what corporations tell it to; it doesn’t run anything.) And it continues to expand its role and power, getting extraordinarily fat tuition money every year, up by a rate calculated at 41 percent higher than inflation over the last 20 years, at a total of what is now close to $300 billion a year. (Harvard, for example, now charges $37,000 annually, only a little more than what 20 percent of American students are charged.) And every year it gets more money from the government, now paying more than 60 percent of university research and development costs ($52 billion in 2008).

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Those in academe wouldn’t call it teaching patriotism, since they believe they are above all that and are in the service of scholarly objectivity, but that is what it is, and why that world has proved such impoverished ground for the serious consideration of secession. Which is a terrible indictment of those institutions that were once bastions of skeptical criticism in this land. •
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