



Metro Justice News

INSIDE:	
IF AT FIRST	2
OUR HAITI	3
EFCA, YES	5
SACK SACHS	6
MOVE MONEY	7

Citizen Action in Rochester

February-March 2010

Mayoral Control Doesn't Work and it's Wrong

By William C. Cala Ed.D,
former Superintendent of Rochester City Schools, Statement to Rochester City Council:

It pains me deeply to have to come before you tonight to speak. It has become apparent that the mayor is bulldozing his way to a takeover of the Rochester City Schools irrespective of the facts and the consequences to the children and the citizens of this city. I have provided you with an extensive analysis of mayoral takeovers throughout the country using validated statistics and citing current and germane research studies on this issue. On February 10, 2009 I sent Mayor Duffy an e-mail providing the essence of the paper that I have provided to you. Unfortunately, the mayor was not interested in the facts and never responded. Last weeks phone efforts proved fruitless as well.

While my three minutes will not provide ample time to highlight all of the extant data and research I will focus on New York City as the mayor has raised

New York as the nexus for his decision for a hostile takeover. No fewer than a dozen times in the past week Mayor Duffy has cited the success of the NYC takeover as a reason to do the same here.

Here are the irrefutable facts:

New York City has been controlled by the mayor since 2002

On the National Assessment of Educational Progress or NAEP the only valid measure of student performance in the nation with a 40 year track record, NYC students have shown no gains in:

- Fourth-grade reading
- Eighth-grade reading
- Eighth-grade math

No gains for African-Americans, Latinos, Asians, Whites or lower income Students

Graduation rates:

SED statistics cite NYC with a 52% graduation rate virtually the same as RCSD

Mayor Bloomberg, however, has invented his own mathematical formulas, utilizing "Discharge Codes." These are labels that he has attached to students who leave the system in order to disguise dropouts. In an April 30th study out of Columbia, the discharge scandal was uncovered: I quote: "The findings of this report suggest that the high school discharge system continues to provide a loosely regulated loophole that can be used to inflate graduation rates by pushing at-risk students out of



William C. Cala

school"

The findings:

The discharge rate went from 17.59% in the year 2000 to 21.1% in 2007

The total number of discharges totals 142,262 kids

Special education discharges went from 17% to 28% in that same time period with a startling 39% discharged in 2005.

The African-American graduation rate for boys is 29%

Enough said about whether mayoral control produces positive academic outcomes. It doesn't. As in the rest of the country Mayoral control in NYC is a dismal failure (Continued on page 7)

SAVE THE DATE

MJ Annual Dinner

Sunday, May 2, 2010

Speaker: Dr. William Cala

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Metro Justice is greater Rochester's leading progressive, multi-issue, citizen-action organization. We enable ordinary people to break through their isolation, join together, educate, agitate, and take non-violent action. Metro Justice has been working for social and economic change since 1965. We seek a more peaceful, just, and sustainable future.

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The Surge: Why Did Obama Do It?

By Doug Noble

Metro Justice Council Member

Antiwar activists have been asking the question: why did President Obama decide to send 30,000 new troops into the Afghanistan quagmire, despite having heard overwhelming evidence against further escalation? Gordon Goldstein's book *Lessons in Disaster*, which was required reading in Obama's war room, provides some answers.

Lessons in Disaster is a detailed review of President Johnson's decision in 1965 to escalate the war in Vietnam, as recounted by McGeorge Bundy, national security advisor for Presidents Kennedy and Johnson and a key architect of that escalation. It shows that the circumstances facing Johnson in 1965 were startlingly similar to those faced by Obama in the current context, providing valuable insight into the new president's counterintuitive (and possibly disastrous) decision to escalate.

The book shows that from 1961 through 1963, President Kennedy had resisted enormous pressures from his advisors and military elite to "Americanize" Vietnam by bombing the North and sending in combat troops. Kennedy had learned from the Bay of Pigs fiasco that his military advisors could not be trusted, so he stood his ground. Kennedy promised that after the next election he would wind down the U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

Bundy confirms that, if Kennedy had lived beyond a victorious 1964 election, the circumstances of his presidency would have been ideal. He would have been in his second term, with no overriding obligation to the electorate. He had no grand legislative agenda going forward to push through Congress. And he had already proven his Cold War boldness during the Cuban missile crisis. Bundy argues that Kennedy would have ended the incipient war in 1965, avoiding the ensuing disaster.

In contrast to Kennedy, says Bundy, Johnson's landslide victory in the 1964 election still left him extremely vulnera-



McGeorge Bundy advising LBJ to escalate the war in Vietnam. Go to <http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/11202009/watch.html> to hear tapes of LBJ discussing escalation in Vietnam.

ble. This was his first term, so he had to consider the next election in everything he did. He had laid out as his "overarching priority" an ambitious legislative agenda ("150 laws in 150 days"), which needed bipartisan support. And Johnson had not yet proven himself through any Cold War achievements, so he needed to demonstrate his presidential boldness in Vietnam. Johnson, therefore, was in a weak position to withstand the withering counsel of key advisors, despite the absence of a coherent military strategy and overwhelming evidence from many quarters that failure was inevitable.

Johnson knew fully the impossibility of success in Vietnam before his fateful 1965 decision, as Goldstein's book amply demonstrates. Vice President Hubert Humphrey was banned from the debate because of his opposition to escalation. U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam Maxwell Taylor advised "keeping ground forces out of a direct counterinsurgency role." General William Westmoreland, top U.S. general in Vietnam, conceded when pressed that the escalation he endorsed could not break the insurgency. In fact there was never a coherent military strategy formulated by the Administration. Bundy, a key champion of mili- (Continued on page 9)

The Haitian Tragedy in Context

By A.N.S.W.E.R.

At such a moment, it is important to put this catastrophe into a political and social context. Without this context, it is impossible to understand both the monumental problems facing Haiti and, most importantly, the solutions that can allow Haiti to survive and thrive. Hillary Clinton said, "It is biblical, the tragedy that continues to daunt Haiti and the Haitian people." This hypocritical statement that blames Haiti's suffering exclusively on an "act of God" masks the role of U.S. and French imperialism in the region.

As CNN, ABC and every other major corporate media outlet will be quick to point out, Haiti is the poorest country in the entire Western hemisphere. But not a single word is uttered as to why Haiti is poor. Poverty, unlike earthquakes, is no natural disaster.

The answer lies in more than two centuries of U.S. hostility to the island nation, whose hard-won independence from the French was only the beginning of its struggle for liberation.

In 1804, what had begun as a slave uprising more than a decade earlier culminated in freedom from the grips of

French colonialism, making Haiti the first Latin American colony to win its independence and the world's first Black republic. Prior to the victory of the Haitian people, George Washington and then-Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson had supported France out of fear that Haiti would inspire uprisings among the U.S.

slave population. The U.S. slave-owning aristocracy was horrified at Haiti's newly earned freedom.

U.S. interference became an integral part of Haitian history, culminating

in a direct military occupation from 1915 to 1934. Through economic and military intervention, Haiti was subjugated as U.S. capital developed a railroad and acquired plantations.

In a gesture of colonial arrogance, Franklin D. Roosevelt, who was the assistant secretary of the Navy at the time, drafted a constitution for Haiti, which, among other things, allowed foreigners to own land. U.S. officials would later find an accommodation with the dictator François "Papa Doc" Duvalier, and then his son Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier, as Haiti suffered under their brutal repressive policies.

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) was instrumental in shifting Haitian agriculture away from grain production, paving the way for dependence on food imports. Ruined Haitian farmers flocked to the cities in search of a livelihood, resulting in the swelling of the precarious shantytowns found in Port-au-Prince and other urban centers.

In the 1980s and 1990s, U.S. policy toward Haiti sought the reorganization of the Haitian economy to better serve the interests of foreign capital. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) was instrumental in shifting Haitian agriculture away from grain production, paving

the way for dependence on food imports. Ruined Haitian farmers flocked to the cities in search of a livelihood, resulting in the swelling of the precarious shantytowns found in Port-au-Prince and other



New York State Governor Nelson Rockefeller visits Haitian dictator Papa Doc Duvalier.

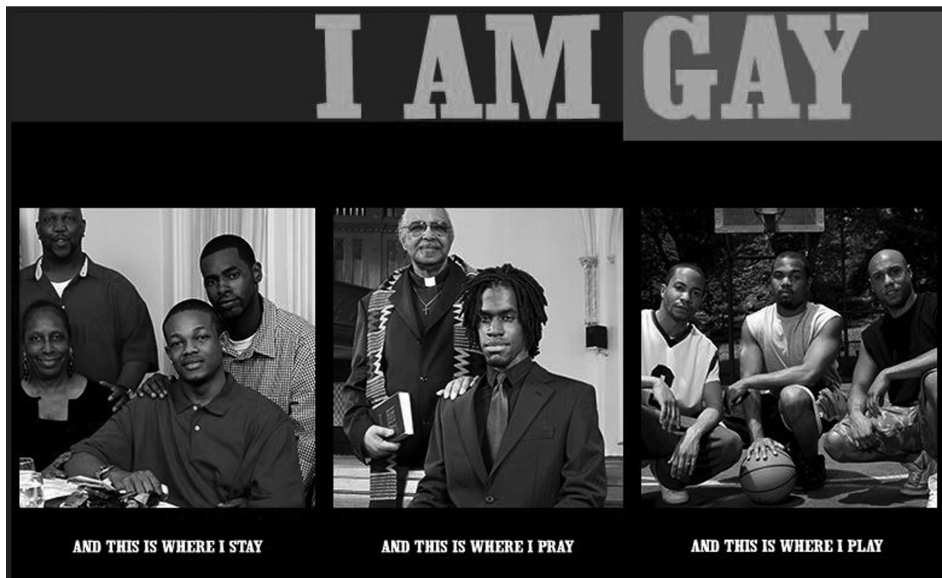
urban centers.

Who has benefited from these policies? U.S. food producers profited from increased exports to Haitian markets. Foreign corporations that had set up shop in Haitian cities benefitted from the super-exploitation of cheap labor flowing from the countryside. But for the people of Haiti, there was only greater misery and destitution.

Washington also orchestrated the overthrow of the democratically elected Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide – not once, but twice, in 1991 and 2004. Haiti has been under a U.S.-backed U.N. occupation for nearly six years. Aristide did not earn the animosity of U.S. leaders for his moderate reforms; he earned it when he garnered support among Haiti's poor, which crystallized into a mass popular movement. Two hundred years on, U.S. officials are still horrified by the prospect of a truly independent Haiti.

The unstable, makeshift dwellings imposed upon Haitians by Washington's neoliberal policies have now, for many, been turned into graves. Those same policies are to blame for the lack of hospitals, ambulances, fire trucks, rescue equipment, food and medicine. The blow dealt by such a natural disaster to an economy made so fragile from decades of plundering will greatly magnify the suffering of the Haitian people. ■

Big Deal Gays Getting Married, Why are Some Black Folks Upset?



By Sam Fulwood III, *Race-Talk.org*

As a church-attending Christian and a straight, married black man who lives in Washington, D.C., I have absolutely no qualms about extending full marriage rights to gay couples. I will cheer when it happens in my city.

I struggle to comprehend why folks who share my slice of the demographic pie seem to take it personally when two men or two women want to marry and live as a couple. I mean, it's not like they're taking something away from any a straight couple.

Here, in Washington, the city council is expected to pass legislation that will legalize marriage for same-sex couples. The bill seems assured of passage because 10 of the 13 city council members have signed on as supporters, and Mayor Adrian Fenty has promised to sign it into law if it passes.

Under the proposed legislation, the district would end the existing domestic partnership law and expand all rights and responsibilities associated with marriage to cover same-sex couples. Another provision of the bill wipes away gender-specific language from the city code, assuring that married gay and lesbian couples are guaranteed to be treated the

same under city law as married heterosexuals.

Yet, the road to marriage equality for gays and lesbians remains twisted by opposition from – of all places – black church leaders. Notably, Bishop Harry Jackson of the suburban Maryland Hope Christian Church has been the most outspoken and visible black minister leading the fight against spreading civil rights to all corners of the nation's capital.

Jackson argues that allowing gays and lesbians to marry will – somehow, inexplicable to me – cause damage to straight people's marital bliss. He argues that the divorce rate in the District is already high and allowing gay couples to marry will add to the soaring numbers of heterosexual divorces. That, of course, makes absolutely no sense.

But the opportunity to build a godly empire by preaching against homosexuality has proven irresistible and potentially profitable. Jackson's High Impact Leadership Coalition, the antigay rights group, moves in far-right circles of the Republican Party. It's a façade for a misguided holy crusade and supported by white evangelicals who have little else in common with black, working-class people in Washington.

The wise thing about the D.C. bill is that it doesn't force a church or minister to perform a marriage if doing so conflicts with their theology. But it allows for those open-minded people of faith to do so. The legislation is civil, not aimed at changing anything that happens inside the practice of faith. Nor would the law grant gay or lesbian couples any special rights – only protect the exercise of the same rights enjoyed by other citizens. In fact, it may prove to be a fiscal blessing to the city.

What's so wrong about all that?

On the racial tip, it seems that the folks who ought to be first in line on this matter of civil right protections should be black ministers. It's not like black gays and lesbians aren't fixtures in black churches across the city. And they're not deeply closeted, either. Everyone knows what these black religious leaders seem so intent on keeping secret: Homosexuality exists among black people.

Less than half a century ago, the black clergy was on the side of unpopular rights and societal progress. If not for the courage and outspokenness of black preachers from southern pulpits, speaking of love and fairness for all of God's children, racist white theologians might have continued unchallenged to use biblical scriptures to justify unfair treatment of black Americans.

A civil right for one is a civil right for all. As Georgia Congressman John Lewis has said on many occasions, "I have fought too hard and too long against discrimination based on race and color not to stand up against discrimination based on sexual orientation."

In a disappointingly similar situation, black churches across Washington and the nation were slow to respond to the AIDS epidemic almost a generation ago, fearing any pulpit talk would lead to airing the congregation's dirty laundry. Meanwhile, as pastors preached and choirs sang, church folks got sick and died. Only after enlightened black religious leaders opened their eyes and stopped condemning were they able to create ministries that helped – not hurt – the people in need.

So pray tell me, how is this any different? ■

Sindicato, Si!

By Rosemary Rivera,
Metro Justice Council Member

For generations, Latinos have been proud to be a vital part of the backbone of the economy in New York State and across the country. From the factories of Upstate, to the hospitals of New York City, the contributions of the Latino community have been vital to the growth and prosperity of our state and our nation.

Yet in spite of these many contributions to the fabric of our state and our country, this community has also suffered threats and intimidation, and some have been forced to live in the shadows, simply for wanting a better life for our families. And even during the boom years, hardworking Latino families have struggled, while surviving on wages that were less in 2007 than in 2000.

That's why new legislation called the Employee Free Choice Act, (EFCA) is now being created to protect the rights of workers in every community and to help them win better jobs. National statistics show that union members generally make an average of \$10,000 a year more than non-union workers, and are significantly more likely to have employer-provided healthcare and a pension. And in the Latino community, the differences are even more significant. According to a recent US Department of Labor study, Latinos who are union members earn a staggering 43% more than those without a union.

Just last year, nearly 120,000 Latinos joined unions. While the numbers and success of Latinos in unions is hard to ignore, the road has not been easy. For years, Latinos have struggled to join unions while being forced to endure horrific treatment at the hands of unwilling employers who have routinely fired and terrorized workers when they try to organize.

But Latinos are no strangers to this struggle. From the days of Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers movement in California, this community has helped



lead the nation toward becoming a more just society while forging the way for a vibrant middle class to emerge.

Under the current laws designed to “protect” workers, 25% of companies still illegally fire workers when they try to form unions, and 92% force employees to attend interrogation meetings with their supervisors in an effort to keep them from joining. And unfortunately, the current penalties are so weak that employers can easily get away with violating workers’ rights.

EFCA would provide protection for workers from being fired when they try to form unions by increasing penalties on employers when they fire workers and violate their lawful rights. Employers would have to pay triple back pay to illegally fired workers and up to a \$20,000 fine per occurrence for repeated violations. The act would also provide for union elections within seven days, to ensure that workers will be free from a prolonged period of intimidation in the march toward their election. Employee Free Choice would require employers to negotiate a first contract within 90 days or workers can seek an effective legal solution through a neutral third party.

But most importantly, the Employee Free Choice Act would help Latino workers improve their jobs and provide for their families by ensuring a path to a first contract that enhances their lives. The passage of the Employee Free Choice Act means a brighter future for Latinos – and our country. ■

Was Harry Reid Right?

By Omar Wasow, *The Root*

It may not have been PC, but the majority leader may simply have been honest about how voters react to skin color. Apparently, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid privately told two journalists in 2008 that Obama was more electable because he’s “light-skinned” and lacked a “Negro dialect, unless he wanted to have one.” With the publication of Reid’s impolitic quote in the new book *Game Change*, journalists John Heilemann and Mark Halperin have landed a PR coup. Lost in all the hand-wringing and shock, however, is any clear explanation of what’s wrong with Reid’s comment. Clearly, using “Negro dialect” is about half-a-century behind the times, but does anyone think Reid meant ill by his anachronism? The substance of Reid’s comments is spot on. Research strongly suggests that white voters do favor lighter-skinned black candidates. Political scientist Nayda Terkildsen studied the effect of skin color on white voting preferences in her 1993 paper, “When White Voters Evaluate Black Candidates” and found that when presented with otherwise identical candidates, white voters generally preferred the white candidate to the black candidate and the lighter-skinned candidate to the darker-skinned candidate.

Further, Reid’s statement that Obama could choose to use a “Negro dialect” is Linguistics 101. Everyone “style shifts” or switches their manner of speech depending on the context, politicians especially so. That Reid would highlight these advantages for Obama’s candidacy merely reflects the fact he’s a savvy politician (if not a savvy commentator about race). So, given all the evidence that Reid was right, what’s he apologizing for? Perhaps, Reid’s real faux pas was talking about our “post-racial” America as if race still mattered. ■

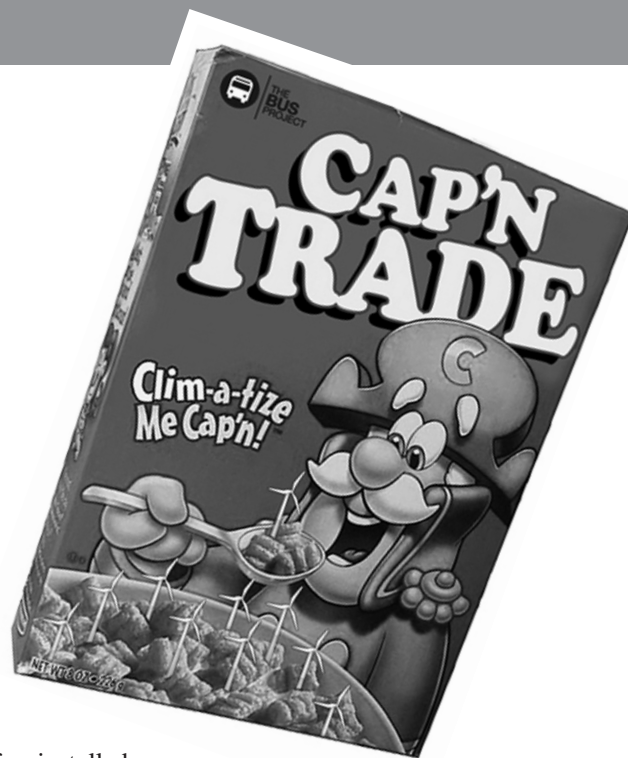
Omar Wasow is a Ph.D. Candidate in African and African American Studies at Harvard University. He was the co-founder of BlackPlanet.com.

Sack Goldman Sachs Cap-and-Trade

By James Hanson,
Climate Change Psychology

The revolving door between Washington and Wall Street has produced a new scheme to fleece the public. “Cap-and-trade” is the heart of the Obama Administration’s plan to slow global warming and reduce our dependence on fossil fuels. Permits to emit a “capped” amount of carbon dioxide will be traded on Wall Street by big-time players like Goldman Sachs. Cap-and-trade was anointed hero status for helping reduce pollution from power plants, specifically acid rain from the sulfur in coal. Seldom have accolades been less deserved. Here, in essence, is how it worked. Congress passed a law, Title IV

of the Clean Air Act, capping sulfur emissions from power plants at 50 percent of 1990 amounts. Utilities reducing emissions more than half could sell excess reductions to other utilities, which then did not need to reduce pollution. Physical changes were simple. Many power plants switched to low-sulfur Wyoming coal and a few installed scrubbers. Sulfur emissions were reduced



almost 50 percent in 20 years. Great success? Hardly.

First, it was like a smoker going from two-packs-a-day to one-pack-a-day. Such a cap imposed by law is a floor, as well as a cap. Physicians for Social Responsibility reported on 18 November that continuing coal emissions are significant contributing factors in four of the five leading causes of mortality in the United States – and the mercury, arsenic and other coal pollutants also cause birth defects, asthma and other ailments. The economic value to the public of further emission reductions exceeds the cost by a factor of 25, but so far the floor has prevented greater reduction.

What is needed is not a cap/floor, but a system designed to wind down the pollution in accord with the public good, not the polluters’ profits. Before defining such a system, let me expose the second, even bigger, whopper in the cap-and-trade gimmick. It is the “horse-trading” that polluters demand before they will allow Congress to pass a cap. Yes, I am sorry to say, in America today, with the role of money in government and a revolving door between Congress and lobbyists, polluters sit astride Congress with brazen “authority”. The horse-trade demanded by polluters before accepting the Clean Air Act was that old power plants be “grandfathered”, avoiding many pollution regulations. These old plants would soon be retired anyway. Wink. Two-thirds of today’s coal-fired (Continued on page 11)

A Good Alternative: Fee-and-Dividend

Any successful approach must recognize a fundamental truth: as long as fossil fuels are the cheapest energy, their use will continue and even increase. Fossil fuels are cheapest because they are not required to pay for their damage to human health and the environment or for climate impacts on current and future generations. “Fee-and-dividend” is a simple solution. A gradually rising carbon fee is collected at the mine or port of entry for each fossil fuel (coal, oil and gas). The fee is uniform, a single number, in dollars per ton of carbon dioxide in the fuel. The public does not directly pay any fee, but the price of goods will rise in proportion to how much fossil fuel is used in their production. One hundred percent of the fee should be distributed to the public, per capita.

For example, if the fee were set now at \$115 per ton of carbon dioxide it would add one dollar per gallon to the price of gasoline and 8 cents per kilowatt-hour to the price of electricity. Given the amount of oil, gas and coal used in the United States in 2007,

that carbon fee yields \$670 billion dollars per year. The resulting dividend for each adult legal resident is about \$3000 per year or \$250 per month. A family with two or more children would receive almost \$9000 per year. The dividend would be sent electronically to bank accounts or added to debit cards.

In reality, the fee probably will be introduced gradually over several years, to minimize waste of infrastructure. Given that about 60 percent of the public will receive more in dividend than they pay via increased energy prices, the public is likely to support continued increase of the carbon fee.

As the fee rises, tipping points will be reached at which various carbon-free energies and carbon-saving technologies are cheaper than fossil fuels plus their fee. As time goes on, fossil fuel use will collapse, remaining coal supplies will be left in the ground, and we will arrive at our clean energy future – free at last from our fossil fuel addiction. Economists agree that fee-and-dividend is more efficient and less costly than cap-and-trade. ■

Move Your Money

Editorial, *The Nation*

“Move Your Money” is an electrifying slogan that’s lighting up the Internet because it shows people how they can push back against the big dogs of banking. The concept is simple, but this is a big idea that could alter the timid direction of financial reform.

This campaign is potentially more than a feel-good gesture. If coordinated with institutional reform efforts, it could lead to a broad rebellion against the financial system, with citizens reclaiming the power to act directly when politicians are too intimidated by moneyed interests to act in the public interest. Economist Jane D’Arista put it crisply: “We are not a nation of widows and orphans. We have quite a lot of money, and people control some of it. They might ask why they don’t control more of it.”

The campaign was launched just before New Year’s Eve by Arianna Huffington of the Huffington Post and Rob Johnson of the Roosevelt Institute. An influential bank-rating firm, Institutional Risk Analytics, donated a website window (moveyourmoney.info/find-a-bank), where citizens can find banks in their ZIP code that IRA certifies as safe and sound.

In the first forty-eight hours more than 100,000 responded with inquiries. Within a week, people had searched for good banks in 16,631 ZIP codes—nearly 40 percent of the nation. The search tool is now getting 45,000 users a day. Naturally, the corporate media promptly assured readers that “ordinary Americans lack the power to hurt the big banks,” as a Washington Post headline put it.

Wrong. The cynics either do not understand banking or misunderstand the widespread public anger. Dennis Santiago, IRA’s CEO and managing director, explained that banks compete fiercely for the “core deposits” provided by individual and small business accounts—this stable money is their preferred base for profitable lending. Take away core deposits, and bankers feel immediate balance-sheet stress. Expand the account base for community banks, and they



gain greater stability and greater lending power. “Will moving your money have an effect?” Santiago asked. “And by effect, I don’t mean making a momentary political statement. I mean making a structural difference to the country’s financial system. The answer is yes.”

Structural change ought to be the primary goal of financial reform—breaking up the concentrated power held by megabanks and creating a balanced system of smaller, more diverse lending institutions that thrive by serving local credit needs. Alas, the Obama administration and Congress are pursuing the opposite goal—rescuing the behemoths that failed and encouraging even greater financial concentration. This will lead to more reckless adventures, more “too big to fail” bailouts.

“Move Your Money” is an important model for teaching people how to change a dysfunctional system. The same principle of taking control of your own money is at work in related reform movements. A campaign launched by faith-based community organizations associated with the Industrial Areas Foundation identifies sky-high interest rates on credit cards and other lending as the ancient sin of usury. IAF groups are asking churches, foundations and local governments to withdraw funds from the usurious banks that profit by destroying borrowers. Organized labor, likewise, has launched an aggressive movement to insist on responsible investing values for the pension-fund wealth of working people, urging state treasurers and fund managers to invest for society’s interests as well as good returns.

Changing the nature of finance capitalism is a long road, to be sure, and the industry will resist change every step of the way. But the fight begins in earnest when people decide to move their money. ■

(**Mayoral Control** from page 1)

and a fraud. Sunday’s Chicago Tribune headlines tell of the failure of mayoral control in Chicago: “Daley School Plan Fails to Make the Grade.”

So what about DEMOCRACY?

City residents are already disenfranchised by laws governing big cities in New York State. While suburban citizens are empowered with the right to vote on their district budgets, city residents are not entitled to do so. Mayoral control effectively removes Rochesterians from any meaningful input into the education of its children.

This issue outweighs any consideration relative to academic outcomes and political perceptions of economic feasibility. Eliminating yet one more avenue to parent and citizen participation in government is an outright assault on democracy. I have cited ample research in my report that demonstrates how citizens, especially minorities have lost their voices in cities where schools are controlled by mayors. Mayor Bloomberg has led the way in denying citizen input of any kind.

Would any type of a takeover like this be suggested in the suburbs? Hardly. There would be a riot. Why are these takeovers occurring? Because the poor have no voice and urban poor are treated like second-class citizens. It is done because mayors can get away with it. They do it because THEY CAN!

Using the logic of the mayoral takeover scheme, Governor Patterson should be calling for a constitutional amendment to eliminate the New York State Legislature and take control of the entire state by himself. I know this has a certain appeal given the reputation of our legislature, but the absurdity of eliminating voters’ voices is autocracy not democracy.

While I have made many suggestions in my paper that can improve the lot of urban children in my report without stomping on the rights of Rochester’s citizens, I recommend that the mayor and city council put the issue on the ballot for the voters to decide whether or not the mayor should take control of the schools and include in the ballot resolution ACCOUNTABILITY. The mayor would be RECALLED if there is no progress in five years. That’s exactly the same accountability the president and secretary of education are calling for when they are insisting that principals and teachers be fired if schools don’t perform. This vote (Continued on page 11)

Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better

By Economic Policy Institute, Institute for America's Future and Institute for Policy Studies (from invitation to talk by William Wilkinson and Kate Pickett)

Where in the developed world do people live the longest? Where do people born at the bottom of the economic ladder have the best shot at climbing up? In which nations do children do best in school? Which countries send the most people to prison; have the teenage pregnancies and suffer the most homicides? The answers matter and are indicative of a society's overall health and the quality of life for its citizens. That is the contention of eminent British epidemiologists Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, authors of *The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger*.

The nations that do the best, on yardstick after yardstick, all turn out to share one basic trait. They all have less income and wealth inequality than their peer nations. The United States, the most unequal nation in Wilkinson and Pickett's book, ranks at or near the bottom of every indicator studied. They applied the same methodology to a study of each of the fifty states in US and again find that social well-being is higher in states with less income and wealth inequality.

The consequences of this work are far reaching. Can inequality, customarily viewed through the lens of taking away from the haves to give to the have nots, actually be the problem policymakers address in improving America's health, social and economic outcomes? ■



Scandinavian countries and Japan consistently have the smallest differences between higher and lower incomes, and the best record of psycho-social health. The countries with the widest gulf between rich and poor, and the highest incidence of most health and social problems, are Britain, America and Portugal.

How Unequal Are We?

By Chris Hartman, Institute for Policy Studies

Inequality Index

- Percentage of U.S. total income in 1976 that went to the top 1% of American households: 8.9.
- Percentage in 2007: 23.5.
- Only other year since 1913 that the top 1 percent's share was that high: 1928.
- Combined net worth of the Forbes 400 wealthiest Americans in 2007: \$1.5 trillion.
- Combined net worth of the poorest 50% of American households: \$1.6 trillion.
- U.S. minimum wage, per hour: \$7.25.
- Hourly pay of Chesapeake Energy CEO Aubrey McClendon, for an 80-hour week: \$27,034.74.
- Average hourly wage in 1972, adjusted for inflation: \$20.06.
- In 2008: \$18.52.

Income data

Median household income in 2008 was \$50,303, according to Census data. Half of American households had income greater than this figure, half had less. Between the end of World War II and the late 1970s, incomes in the United States were becoming more equal. In other words, incomes at the bottom were

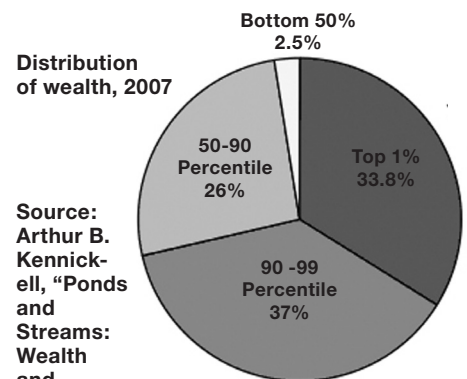
rising faster than those at the top. Since the late 1970s, this trend has reversed. For example, data from tax returns show that the top 1% of households received 8.9% of all pre-tax income in 1976. In 2007, the top 1% share had more than doubled to 23.5%.

Between 1979 and 2008, the top 5% of American families saw their real incomes increase 73%, according to Census data. Over the same period, the lowest-income fifth saw a decrease in real income of 4.1%. In 1980, the average income of the top 5% of families was 10.9 times as large as the average income of the bottom 20 percent, according to Census data. In 2008, the ratio was 20.6 times.

In 2007, the latest year for which figures are available from the Federal Reserve Board, the richest 1% of U.S. households owned 33.8% of the nation's private wealth. That's more than the combined wealth of the bottom 90 percent.

The top 1% also own 50.9% of all stocks, bonds, and mutual fund assets.

Retirement accounts like 401(k)s are more equally distributed. The top 1% owns only 14.5% of all retirement account assets, while the bottom 90% owns 40.5%.



Source: Arthur B. Kennickell, "Ponds and Streams: Wealth and Income in the U.S., 1989 to 2007," Federal Reserve Board Working Paper, January 7, 2009, Figure A3a, p. 63.

The total inflation-adjusted net worth of the Forbes 400 rose from \$502 billion in 1995 to \$1.6 trillion in 2007 before dropping back to \$1.3 trillion in 2009.

Net Worth is highly unequal when it comes to race. In 2004, the latest year for which Federal Reserve figures are available, the typical white household had a net worth about seven times as large as the typical African American or Hispanic household.

Since the 1980s, Americans have spent more and more of their income on expenses, leaving less for savings. The U.S. Personal Savings Rate declined from 10.9 percent in 1982 to 1.4 percent in 2005 before rising to 2.7 percent by 2008. ■

Our Democracy Can't Be Sold

By Karen Scharff, Executive Director,
Citizen Action of NY

On Thursday, January 21, 2010, the Supreme Court ruled in *Citizens United v. FEC* that corporations have free reign to spend unlimited money on elections, ignoring two decades of precedent. The stakes are high. If big business like health insurance companies, oil companies, and Wall Street investment firms are allowed to spend billions to get candidates elected, the voices of ordinary people across America will be silenced. Congress can stop the effects of this ruling by passing the Fair Elections Now Act, public financing of elections.

Sign the Petition at http://action.citizenactionny.org/p/dia/action/public/?action_KEY=599

“Our democracy is in jeopardy because of the Supreme Court decision in *Citizens United v. FEC*. The voices of ordinary Americans will be drowned out by the billions of dollars corporations are now allowed to spend freely in elections. Congress must act to ensure elections can be fair by passing the Fair Elections Now Act, public financing of elections.” ■



(Noble from page 2)

tary escalation, was vague about actual military strategies and missions. Goldstein writes, “There was a fundamental imprecision in Bundy’s argument for escalation in 1965. He marched ahead with the expectation that an undefined degree of coercive military pressure would extract an undefined form of political capitulation over an undefined period of conflict.”

The closest Bundy and military advisors came to a military strategy was their proposal to use overwhelming military force, with bombing and ground troops, to break the North Vietnamese will to fight. Westmoreland explained, “The basic purpose of the additional deployments is to give U.S. a ... hard hitting offensive capability ... to convince the VC they cannot win.” Military force, then, would be used not

to secure victory but merely as a prolonged effort at demoralization, in a war of attrition.

But even this limited strategy was doomed from the start. The military had conducted high-level war games, SIGMA I and SIGMA II, that demonstrated conclusively that sustained air strikes would fail to weaken Hanoi’s determination. Goldstein concludes, “SIGMA I did not matter. SIGMA II did not matter. The views of expert [s]... did not matter. Other well-known estimates ... from the CIA, the Defense Intelligence Agency, and the State Department ... did not matter.” Bundy told Goldstein that Johnson had tried to create the illusion of a process of intense deliberation. “He wanted the record to be every argument was made and every voice heard.” But in the end, despite all contrary evidence, Johnson

himself made the fateful decision to escalate.

How could this have happened? The answer is that military victory, even limited success, was never really the goal. Bundy had written in 1965, “...in terms of U.S. politics, which is better: to ‘lose’ now or to ‘lose’ after committing 100,000 men?” His answer: “the latter.” A military defeat was acceptable politically ... so long as a sufficient price was paid in lost lives to demonstrate the commitment and credibility of the U.S. – and of the Johnson administration – in opposing communism. For Bundy, the “cardinal” principle was for the U.S. “not to be a paper tiger.” The escalation in Vietnam – sending thousands of men and women into harm’s way – had nothing to do with what they might reasonably accomplish militarily. Instead, the com- (Continued on page 11)

ACORN Vindicated!

By Bill Quigley,
Center for Constitutional Rights

On December 11, 2009, a federal judge ruled that Congress had unconstitutionally cut off federal funds to ACORN. The judge issued an injunction stopping federal authorities from continuing to cut off funds to the community organization.

The court ruled that Congress violated the U.S. Constitution by singling out ACORN and its affiliates for severe sweeping restrictions and that such action constitutes illegal punishment or a bill of attainder.

What is a bill of attainder? Bills of attainder are acts of Congress which unilaterally punish an individual or organization. Essentially Congress acts as prosecutor, judge, jury and executioner. The U.S. Constitution has prohibited bills of attainder since 1787. U.S. founders objected to bills of attainder because in England, Parliament passed many such bills against political enemies, using

them to throw people in prison and even execute them without trial.

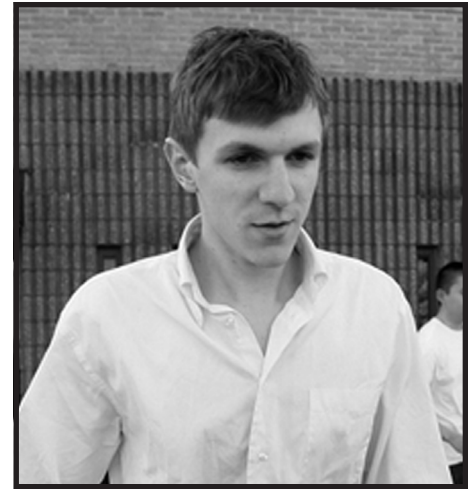
Congress punished ACORN without even trying to figure out if any laws had been broken or allowing the 500,000 member organization to defend itself.

What about protecting the taxpayers against fraud? As the court pointed out, there are many legal ways for the government to investigate and terminate federal contractors which have been proven to engage in fraud or illegal activity.

Fox News is obsessed with ACORN. Google Fox News and ACORN and you will see over two million hits. Google Glenn Beck and ACORN and you get over a million hits, six hundred thousand for Rush, and three hundred thousand for Michelle Malkin.

Right wing members of Congress accused ACORN of being a shell game using millions of taxpayer dollars to advertise for a political candidate and which helped President Obama get elected. After a highly dubious right-wing sting operation in September, the conservative media machine overran Congress members, including, sadly, many Democrats, and passed the bill of attainder cutting off all federal funds to ACORN and any affiliates, subsidiaries and allies.

ACORN won this case. The U.S. Supreme Court has called the prohibition of congressional bills of attainder a bulwark against tyranny. Here the bulwark



Meanwhile... James, O'Keefe, the conservative operative who posed as a pimp to set up ACORN workers has been busted on felony charges of phone tampering in Senator Mary Landrieu's office (D- LA). The House Judiciary Committee and Massachusetts Attorney General Harshbarger's Commission both exonerated ACORN staff of any wrongdoing. O'Keefe was already in legal trouble for the illegal secret taping of ACORN staff.

against tyranny worked to stop the right-wing smear machine.

But the rule of law won too. And all of us and Congress have again been taught a valuable lesson there are no shortcuts when it comes to following the Constitution. ■

Why welfare reform fails its recession test

By Peter Edelman and Barbara Ehrenreich, *Washington Post*

Mulugeta Yimer is a 56-year-old Alexandria cabdriver who escaped poverty and persecution in Ethiopia 20 years ago only to be clobbered by the recession says he is averse to government handouts, but when he contemplates what might be in store for his wife and their two young children, he muses wistfully, "There's always welfare, isn't there?"

Actually, no. When President Bill Clinton signed welfare reform into law, he didn't just end welfare as we knew it. For all practical purposes, he brought an end to cash help of any kind for most families with children. The recession has shown how seriously unprepared it left us for hard times.

Unemployment and food stamp programs have started to rise to the challenge and have even begun to lose their

stigma among former members of the middle class. The number of unemployment insurance recipients is up by 17% and food stamps recipients by 25% since before the recession, now serving 36 million people.

By contrast, the caseload for TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, the name we now give welfare) is about 5 million people. This number is up by about 1 million since the beginning of the recession, but it's still just a little over a third of what it was 15 years ago, before welfare reform.

Why the huge difference between unemployment insurance and food stamp usage and welfare caseloads? People have a legal right to food stamps, but since 1996 there has been no legal right to cash assistance.

Benefits are tiny, too, with 30 states paying a maximum benefit that's less

than 30 percent of the federal poverty line. Mississippi skimps by offering its TANF recipients \$170 a month for a family of three, about 9 percent of the poverty line and barely enough to cover the utility bills.

In some states, according to Kaaryn Gustafson of the University of Connecticut law school, "applying for welfare is a lot like being booked for a crime." There may be a mug shot, fingerprinting and lengthy interrogations as to the true paternity of one's children. Word gets around, and, even in the face of destitution, many people will not undergo such indignities.

It's time to acknowledge that America's 1996 experiment with welfare reform was based on reckless assumptions about the economy, as well as a callous disregard for the realities of sustaining a family. ■

(Mayoral Control from page 7)

should take place after vigorous debate and BEFORE our legislators go to Albany with a mayoral control bill in hand.

Mayor Duffy has cast opponents as QUOTE “a small group of self-interested adults and cheap politics to sway public opinion UNQUOTE. I hardly call this a desire to debate the issues. Metro Justice, Parents Groups and the Anti-Racism Coalition and the mayor. Who’s the politician in the group??

The takeover is not about kids and student performance. It’s about power, control and money.

My plea to you tonight is to do everything within your power to preserve the voices of the poor and reject a mayoral control.

I would rather live in a messy democracy than in a tidy autocracy.

Thank you for your time and patience. ■

(Noble from page 9)

mitment of all these lives was purely symbolic, to demonstrate presidential fortitude and U.S. credibility.

* * *

What does all this have to do with Obama’s decision to send 30,000 troops to Afghanistan? Compare his presidency to Johnson’s in 1965. Obama convincingly won an election, but like Johnson he is extremely vulnerable. This is his first term, with the next election weighing on all he does. He, too, is staking his presidency on pushing an ambitious legislative agenda, including health care and economic reform, through a fractious Congress. And Obama, too, has not yet proven himself against the evil enemy, now called “terrorism.”

Obama, then, needs desperately to demonstrate his own presidential boldness and that of the U.S. government. It is not surprising, therefore, that Obama has launched the surge, despite overwhelming evidence - from his advisors, Ambassador, Vice President, and countless intelligence reports - that failure, if not disaster, is inevitable. And it is also not surprising that, as many analysts have noted, he has offered no coherent military strategy beyond the use of overwhelming force to break the Taliban and Al Qaeda momentum. Once

again military strategy seems really to be besides the point.

New York Times’ Peter Baker recently offered a revealing account, based on dozens of interviews and participants’ notes, of how Obama reached his decision. Excerpts suggest that it may again be only an illusion that deliberation led to the president’s decision.

First, Mr. Obama firmly closed the door on any withdrawal. “I just want to say right now, I want to take off the table that we’re leaving Afghanistan.” General McChrystal’s grim assessment had lent urgency to the question of what to do to avoid defeat.

He emphasized the need for speed. “What I’m looking for is a surge,” Mr. Obama said. The military was told to come up with a plan to send troops quickly and then begin bringing them home quickly. “His advisers sat in uncomfortable silence.”

Mr. Obama assumed there would be a middle ground between 10,000 and 40,000, saying, “If people are having trouble swallowing 40, let’s see if we can make this smaller and easier to swallow...”

The escalation in Afghanistan, as in Vietnam – sending thousands of men and women into harm’s way – appears to have little to do with what these troops might reasonably accomplish militarily. Instead, once again, the commitment of these lives appears to be symbolic, designed to demonstrate presidential fortitude and U.S. credibility.

The only difference (and the most confounding point of all) is that Obama and his advisors, having themselves read *Lessons in Disaster*, nonetheless repeat the two mistakes of Johnson’s decision. It led to a prolonged, disastrous war with immeasurable death and suffering, which Johnson could have predicted. But what Johnson did not know was that his miscalculation would also end his own political career. Obama has the great advantage of knowing of Johnson’s fall, with its dire implication for Obama’s own political future. Yet he has repeated the script verbatim anyway.

Bundy describes President Kennedy as “a man who built no realities on hopes,” who realized that “intervention is a presidential choice, not an inevitability.” Sadly, Obama learned nothing from his lessons. ■

(Sack Goldman Sachs from page 6)
power plants were constructed before 1970. Utilities find it highly profitable to keep patching up these old polluting cash cows. Meanwhile, public health continues to suffer.

These basic problems, the floor on pollution and horse-trading, recur, in spades, in the cap-and-trade scheme hatched by big banks and Washington to slow carbon dioxide emissions and reduce fossil fuel use. Cap-and-trade sets a nominal emissions cap by auctioning permits to pollute. This cap is a floor – if emissions went below the cap, permit price would collapse leaving no incentive for further emissions reduction. Moreover, the cap is a faux cap, a fiction. The real cap is higher, because of “offsets” – alternatives to emission reductions, such as tree planting on degraded land, avoided deforestation in Brazil, or investments in developing countries. Caps are raised by the offset amount, but offsets are often imaginary or unverifiable. Avoided deforestation, for example, does not reduce demand for lumber or food growing area, so deforestation moves elsewhere. Horse-trading further mars the outcome. House and Senate energy bills legislate continued coal use, making it implausible that carbon dioxide emissions will decline sharply.

What is driving cap-and-trade? Note that the skilled, secretive trading unit of Goldman Sachs is poised to make billions of dollars off cap-and-trade. Banks and other private equity firms already have more than 100 representatives working the issue. The carbon market is expected to be worth more than a trillion dollars. Wall Street wants the market to be loosely regulated, open to speculators, and to include over-the-counter derivatives. There is a pretty good chance for that, given the Washington-Wall Street revolving door. Where will the banks’ profits come from? All costs of the pollution trading system are extracted from the public, via increased energy prices. And there is no dividend to the public. In contrast, the fee-and-dividend approach described below only requires the government to divide the collected fee by the number of legal residents. The entire collected fee goes to the public. Goldman Sachs does not get one thin dime. Sound good? ■

Dr. James Hansen is the chief climate scientist at NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies (GISS) and is the man who originally raised the alarm on global warming in 1988

Metro Justice, Inc.
167 Flanders Street
Rochester, New York 14619

MJ Calendar

Let's pack the forums!

Tue., Feb. 2, 6pm, Mayoral Control Forum.
Clinton-Baden Street Community Center, 485
N. Clinton Ave.

Thur., Feb. 4, 6pm, Mayoral Control Forum.
School of the Arts, 45 Prince Street.

Tue., Feb. 9, 6pm, Mayoral Control Forum.
Edgerton Community Center, 85 Adams Street

Wed., Feb. 10, 6pm, Mayoral Control Forum.
Adams Street Community Center, 85 Adams
Street.

Continuing Activities:

Every Sunday, Noon-1, Peace Action & Educa-
tion (PA&E) weekly antiwar vigil at East Avenue
and Goodman. Please join us in standing against
the occupation of Iraq and demanding U.S.
troops home now.

Second Tuesday, 6:30pm, AQE/Push Back
Core Committee meeting. Call 325-2560 to get
involved with the City Council and School Board
voter mobilization project.

First Wed., 7pm, Rochester Committee on
Latin America, Downtown United Presbyterian
Church, 121 North Fitzhugh Street.

Third Mon., 7:15pm, Metro Justice Council
meeting, 167 Flanders St. If you would like to
address the Council, please contact Tanya at
tanya_metroj@frontiernet.net or at 325-2560 to
get on the agenda.

Fourth Thurs., 7pm, Ciudad Hermana Task
Force, St. Anne Church, 1600 Mt Hope Ave.

Membership

Yes! I want to Join Metro Justice and support
the important work it does. Levels of support:

\$30 \$50 \$70 \$100 Other \$ _____

Name _____

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If you would like your contribution to support our
campaigns and lobbying work, make checks payable to
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*Your commitment to social justice can continue
beyond your own lifetime. Consider making
Metro Justice a bequest in your will or as a
beneficiary on a life insurance policy.*

*Contact Tanya Smolinsky
at 325-2560.*

MJ
Planned Giving
Justice Forever.