

Should the mighty U.S. military be concerning itself with a small group of Quakers in Lake Worth, Florida?

The answer, of course, is no...but they're doing it anyway. Two years ago, top Pentagon officials (including "Howling Paul" Wolfowitz, then the number-two honcho) directed a little-known agency called Counter-Intelligence Field Activity (CIFA) to create a new database for snooping on U.S. citizens. The database was to include "information related to potential terrorist threats directed against the Department of Defense."

Whether or not CIFA's database has snared any Al Qaeda plotters, it has snared the Lake Worth Quakers. Indeed, a 400-page Pentagon report lists a meeting of a dozen or so of these antiwar Quakers as a terrorist "threat."

What were these fiendish Quakers doing? Planning a peaceful protest against military recruitment at local high schools.

The database, obtained by NBC News, shows that some four dozen antiwar meetings were under military surveillance on the grounds that they posed a terrorist threat to the Pentagon. Also, CIFA has doled out over \$33 million in contracts to Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman, Computer Sciences Corporation, and others to search the private records of Americans to detect "threats." CSC, for example, got Pentagon money for its computer-based "Insider Threat Initiative" to search, detect, and investigate "abnormal activities and behaviors" of people of interest.

This takes America back to the dark days of the Vietnam War, when a paranoid Pentagon was infiltrating and spying on groups of U.S. citizens involved in antiwar and civil-rights protests. Like then, today's Pentagon spokesman refuses to comment, except to say that all domestic intelligence information is "properly collected."



LOWDOWN

Edited by Jim Hightower and Phillip Frazer ■ Vol. 8 No. 02 ■ February 2006

Forget Washington, all GOOD politics is local States, cities go for Living Wage, Clean Elections, and medical pot

What an embarrassment our national government is. Mired in the sickening muck of corrupt corporate money and right-wing ideology, our so-called leaders continue to divert our public treasury and our nation's unlimited potential for good into war, into the pockets of the superrich, into the self-serving whims of greedheaded corporate executives, into a rising police state, into the careless desecration of nature...into waste.

Then why am I laughing, why am I almost giddy with optimism about where we're heading? You might say, *That's an easy question, Hightower—you're either stupid or insane.* Indeed, I know a few leaders of progressive groups based in Washington who have been drained of all optimism. Looking at the national scene, they share Woody Allen's despairing observation: "We stand today at a crossroads: One path leads to despair and utter hopelessness. The other leads to total extinction. Let's hope we have the wisdom to make the right choice."

Luckily, however, my work is not based in Washington, and my frequent travels allow me to be in touch with a grassroots America that's unabashedly progressive and on the move. Yes, Washington is ignoring our country's real needs and squandering our democratic

promise, but out beyond the Beltway (and below the radar of the Powers That Be) there are folks, groups, coalitions, and even elected leaders who're taking action at the state and local level to build an America based on our historic ideals of fairness, justice, and equal opportunity for all. I have great hope, because grassroots people are so much stronger, more resilient,

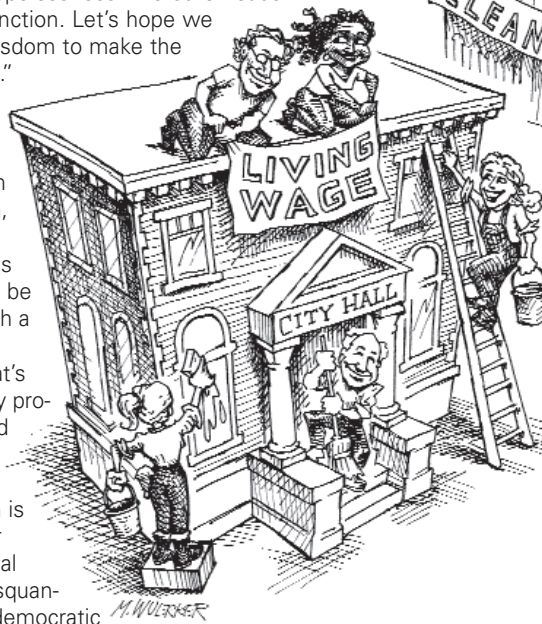
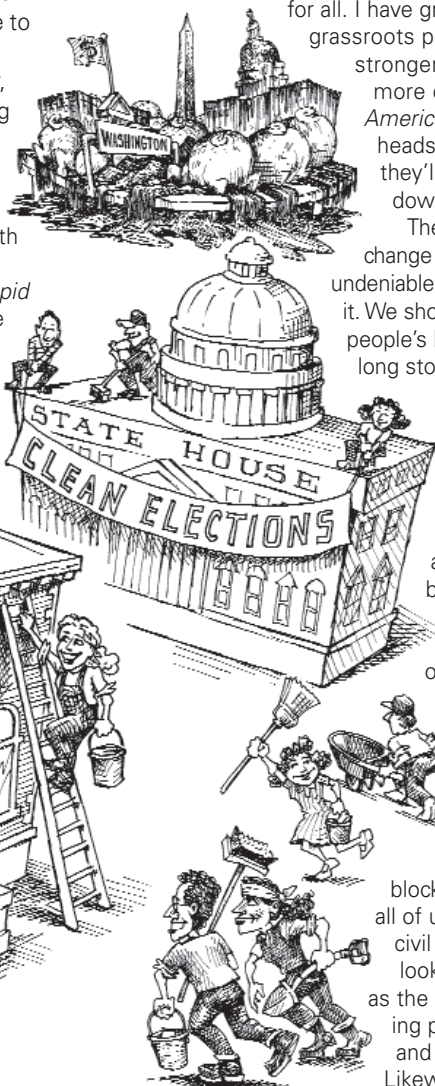
more creative, and more American than the gooberheads at the top, and they'll not long be held down or held back.

There is a ferment for change in our land today and undeniable movement toward it. We should take heart in our people's history, which is the long story of ordinary folks

agitating, organizing, and mobilizing for a little more justice. Progress often gets diverted or dammed up by the avaricious powers, but it ultimately finds another outlet.

I can give my own testimonial to this dynamic.

Coming of political age in segregated Texas in the 1960s, recalcitrant state and local officials were blocking progress—so all of us involved in the civil rights movement looked to Washington as the channel for producing progressive action—and we made progress. Likewise, in the 1970s, it



Do you sometimes fear that the American people have become as fat, lazy, and submissive as a bunch of cud-chewing cows, that we can be led anywhere the Powers That Be choose to take us? Well, if you think that We the People have totally lost our rebellious spark, let me tell you a heartening cow story.

Few creatures in the animal kingdom are perceived to be as doltish and docile as your average bovine, which seems content to spend its short life standing in a field mooing, eating, and pooping—before being led to slaughter. So, imagine the surprise of people in Southern California to learn that a herd of nine wily, wiry, and wild cows are loose in the canyons and brush of the Santa Monica Mountains.

These are renegade cows that escaped from a rancher's pen five years ago and bolted into the neighboring national recreation area in the mountains.

Though you'd think that it would be easy to track down a herd of thousand-pound, brown-black-and-white cattle in a frequently used park just across Interstate 405 from Beverly Hills, these rebels have rarely been seen, much less rounded up.

How could such lumbering sirloins-to-be avoid detection?

It turns out that even slow-moving farm animals never really lose their wild side. One park ranger who has seen some of the wild Santa Monica 9 reports that they are elusive, cunning, and surprisingly fleet of foot. "I came close to them," he says, "and they just took off running like a deer might if you were to get too close."

If these feral rebels are captured they will have to resign themselves to their original fate, the meat market. The lesson here is that we all have the seed of insurgency within us, ready to empower us to break loose from the confines of the corporate order and live life on our own terms.

was through the national government that we opened channels for progress on women's rights, worker safety, environmental protections, etc.

By the 1980s, however, the monied interests were locking down both parties in Washington, and progressives were largely stymied. But not for long—a trickle of action soon began coming out of cities and states across the country. I was one of those small trickles. Having been elected Texas agriculture commissioner in '82, my office became a source of action for small farmers, organic production, pesticide regulation, direct marketing, rural development, renewable energy, and more.

Since then, with corporate and right-wing interests seizing all three branches of the national government, and with the Democratic leadership being either co-opted or inept, the flow of progressive energy has moved steadily out of Washington and (like water finding a new course) into grassroots organizing. In the past decade, these feisty groups—using street actions, ballot initiatives, lawsuits, the internet, media exposés, local elections, radio, potluck suppers, festivals, satire, and every other tool at their disposal—have become a powerful force on a wide range of issues, and they are changing American politics from the ground up. Let's take stock of some of the progress being made.

Wage wars

For years, Washington and Wall Street have been waging a war on American wages, using everything from monetary policy to immigration policy in their constant effort to push workers' pay down.

The most visible of these efforts is the obscene sight of fat-cat CEOs and well-paid Congress critters conspiring to keep our country's wage floor stuck at the subpoverty level of \$5.15 an hour (about \$10,500 a year). As John Edwards says, "it's a

moral disgrace." Yet despite support for boosting the minimum wage from 86% of Americans (including the chairman of Wal-Mart, who wails that these poverty workers can't afford to shop at his stores), corporate lobbyists have kept hourly pay nailed down at \$5.15 for nearly a decade. Washington won't budge, so there's nothing we can do, right?

Wrong. Led by ACORN, the innovative community-organizing group, a broad coalition of wage-increase advocates has shifted the battlefield to the cities, counties, and states, putting forth a concept called the "Living Wage." The idea is that corporations getting contracts, subsidies, or other benefits from local governments should not get away with poverty pay. Pushing local ordinances or ballot measures, the Living Wage coalitions propose pay scales that raise the minimum above the region's poverty level, with most proposals requiring some health-care benefits and many indexing the pay levels to inflation.

Well, you might think, that's a nice proposition, but people are way too conservative to go for it. Wrong. In fact, when put before voters, Living Wage initiatives typically win by more than two thirds of the vote. A telling case is Florida. In 2004, a modest initiative was on the ballot proposing to raise the state's minimum wage by a buck, to \$6.15 an hour. John Kerry's presidential campaign studiously avoided supporting this measure, fearing that voters in this red state were so conservative that being associated with a wage hike would hurt his chances. So much for his political genius—72% of Floridians approved the pay increase! Kerry, on the other hand, got only 47% of the vote.

For these Living Wage battles, coalitions have been forged among workers, poor people, women, churchgoers, small-business owners, neighborhood groups, civil-

rights advocates—and even some conservative business leaders who either see it as a moral issue or understand that higher pay means more spending and a stronger local economy. That's a pretty stout coalition! While it has received little national media coverage, these combined efforts are achieving stunning successes all across the country. More than 130 cities, counties, and states have already enacted some form of the Living Wage.

These victories are not just coming in the liberal outposts of, say, New York City and San Francisco, but also in such places as Dayton, OH (\$9.30 per hour, with benefits); Palm Beach, FL (\$9.73, with benefits); Louisville, KY (\$10.20, indexed to inflation); Pima County, AZ (\$8.35, with benefits, indexed); Bozeman, MT (\$9.73, with benefits); Rochester NY (\$9.43, with benefits, indexed); Covallis, OR (\$9.00, indexed); the Richmond, VA, school district (\$8.77, with benefits); and the Central Arkansas Library System (\$9.00, with benefits, indexed).

Clean Elections

What a scream it was last month to watch George W, Tom DeLay, and some 60 other top elected officials rush out to throw tens of thousands of dollars at various charities. These were campaign funds they had previously taken from sleazeball super-lobbyist Jack Abramoff. Until January 2, none of these politicians had been even slightly squeamish about banking Jack's checks. But on that day, the GOP's leading influence peddler pleaded guilty to three counts of money corruption involving his lobbying operation.

As part of his plea deal, Abramoff agreed to "tell all" to federal prosecutors about his money-for-favors relationships in Washington...and to testify against his former political cohorts. When the lead prosecutor declared that the corruption "is very

Do something!

Information and Agitation: To join ongoing efforts or to help start your own action group where you live, these three advocacy organizations provide excellent materials, models, connections, advice, how-to instructions, and other support on the main issues covered in this *Lowdown*:

■ **The Living Wage Resource Center**
88 3rd Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11217
718-246-7900, ext 230
www.livingwagecampaign.org

■ **Public Campaign**
1320 19th Street, NW, Suite M-1
Washington, DC 20036
202-293-0222
www.publiccampaign.org
info@publiccampaign.org

■ **Marijuana Policy Project**
P.O. Box 77492
Capitol Hill
Washington, DC 20013
1-877-JOIN-MPP (1-877- 564-6677)
www.mpp.org

For more info on children and pesticides in last month's *Lowdown*, the correct number is 218-226-4164.

extensive," that did it. Suddenly our stalwart leaders were spontaneously struck with the need to offer up loads of cash to charity—as if such a showy gesture could remove the indelible green stain that contaminates them and our national capital. Of course, giving back a few bucks doesn't alter the culture of corruption (notice, for example, that while George W grandly donated \$6,000 of his Abramoff money to charity, he refused to give away as much as \$200,000 that Jack had raised for his '04 run).

Sheesh. The spreading Abramoff scandal, coupled with DeLay's Texas indictments for money laundering, the Duke Cunningham bribery conviction, and the relentless pursuit of corporate dollars by practically all of our top political leaders shows that we no longer have elections—we have auctions. Can't something be done?

It can be...and is—but not in Washington. Once again, the action is in the countryside. In the past decade, eight states and fourteen cities have passed "Clean Election" laws to end the money chase in their political races, and eight other states and at least one major city are moving toward passage of such laws this year.

The key component of Clean Elections is to provide the alternative of *public* financing for the campaigns of all candidates who agree not to accept money from corporations or other favor-seeking interests. This means that people running for mayor, governor, the legislature, a judgeship, or whatever don't have to spend the bulk of their campaign time in corporate suites or at the watering holes of lobbyists—and if elected, they owe absolutely nothing to the monied powers! It also means that regular people (a schoolteacher, factory worker, nurse, farmer, shopkeeper, cab-driver, Lowdown subscriber, et al)

can run for office, for they could qualify for a level of public funding that would make them competitive with a lobbyist-financed candidate. It gives us a meaningful tool for reclaiming our democracy.

Maine, Arizona, and Connecticut now have public-financing laws for all of their state offices, from governor to corporation commissioner. Vermont and Massachusetts have also approved statewide systems but have not yet implemented them. In addition, North Carolina has okayed public funding for its judicial races, New Mexico has done so for candidates seeking to be on its Public Regulation Commission, and New Jersey has approved a pilot project for public financing in four legislative districts.

Cities are on the move, too. Portland, Oregon, will have the Clean Election alternative for all of its city races this year. In 2005 69% of Albuquerque's voters said "yes" to a charter amendment providing public funds for its mayoral and city council candidates. Another 12 cities have put partial systems in place, and Los Angeles is presently structuring a plan for full public financing.

Most important, the Clean Election system works. In Maine, the state AARP, AFL-CIO, Common Cause, Council of Senior Citizens, Dirigo Alliance, League of Women Voters, Peace Action, Peoples Alliance, and others joined hands in 1996 to pass an initiative creating the nation's first public-financing program. When first implemented in 2000, half of the state's senators and 30% of house members were elected without taking a dime in special-interest money, and the program has grown more successful with each election. Today 83% of Maine's senate and 77% of its house are made up of legislators who ran "clean."

The result is that Maine's state

government is able to reflect the people's will. In 2003, for example, Maine became the first state to pass a bill providing health care for all of its people. As a state legislator says, "There is just no way this bill would ever have seen the light of day under business-as-usual politics dominated by private campaign contributions. Instead, we took on the big pharmaceutical and insurance companies and adopted a health-care plan that serves the people rather than special interests."

Now the incumbent Democratic governor and two of his three Republican challengers have taken the "clean" pledge for this year's election. Last year the state fixed a loophole in its law by requiring that in the last 21 days of an election, all attack ads or other campaign material put out by so-called "independent" groups must disclose the source behind the ads. In addition, the state will provide public matching funds for the candidates who are attacked, so they can respond.

There's similar success elsewhere. In Arizona, for example, 58% of the house, a fourth of the senate, and 10 of 11 statewide officials (including the governor) are "clean." The grassroots coalition that passed Arizona's public-financing system in a 1998 ballot initiative has also remained vigilant, beating back seven court challenges and repeated efforts by corporate interests to repeal the law.

Again, there's no need to wait on Washington for electoral reform when you can make it happen in your own city, county, school district, state, or any other jurisdiction you choose to tackle.

Reefer medicine

Isn't being horribly sick punishment enough without having the FBI, DEA, and other police agents

LOCAL ACTION ON GLOBAL WARMING

Instead of recognizing the obvious—that global warming is fast reaching the tipping point where it becomes irreversible (and disastrous)—the Bushites continue to keep their heads up the tailpipes and smokestacks of the industries pumping out the greenhouse gases causing the unnatural warming.

So, we're doomed, right? Not necessarily. While Washington foolishly fiddles, officials at the state level have been springing into action. Unlike the White House, state leaders are up close and personal with the effects of global warming. These range from declines in the production of some crops to having to plan for rising sea levels along coastlines. So these officials have gotten serious about restricting the amount of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases coming out of vehicle tailpipes, the second-largest (and fastest-growing) source of global-warming gases.

California has been in the lead and has adopted a rule that 10 years from now cars and trucks must have technology in place reducing the emission of these gases by 30%. No, scream the automakers, this will cause marketplace chaos, car sales will cease, the sky will fall!

The industry refuses to support any restriction on tailpipe emissions of carbon dioxide, instead rushing to court to stop the California rule and to require that only the federal government can regulate these gases. Of course, that would maintain the status quo of do-nothingism. One environmental lawyer says, "We are going to become the dumping ground for the dirtiest cars made in the world. China will have more stringent standards than the U.S. in 2010."

Meanwhile, eight states—from Connecticut to Oregon—have adopted the California rule. For more info, contact the Union of Concerned Scientists at 617-547-5552.

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PENTAGON SAYS TROOPS UNPROTECTED

Good God Almighty! Is there no one at the Pentagon or in the White House with a brain...or a soul?

From the beginning of Bush's wretched war in Iraq three years ago, our troops have been screaming to get adequate armor for both their bodies and their vehicles. Yet, astonishingly, Bush and the other dunderheads at the top have fumbled these life-and-death requests. Now, a secret Pentagon report reveals that up to 80% of the marines killed in Iraq from upper-body wounds would not have died if they had the proper body armor. Yet the marine brass did not even begin buying this armor until last September—and more than 90% of the units ordered still have not been delivered to Iraq.

Equally disgusting, many soldiers have died because their lightly armored Humvees are easily penetrated by roadside bombs. An armored truck called the Cougar could have saved their lives, but the Pentagon started ordering this vehicle only last May, and delivery to Iraq is three months behind schedule!

This delay comes because the Cougar contract went to a small, politically connected outfit in South Carolina that had never mass-produced vehicles and botched the job. A dozen prototypes did get to Iraq, but they had to be recalled because of failing transmissions, etc.

Meanwhile, our blasé leaders dismiss criticism, saying they're doing all they can as fast as can be expected.

If George, Dick, and Rummy really gave a damn about soldiers, top corporations like General Motors would have been brought into a crash program immediately to meet the needs of our vulnerable troops. Instead of continuing to make \$50,000 Hummers for war-evading yuppies, GM should've been enlisted to make Cougars. But that would require a real president.

busting down your door to throw you in jail? Unfortunately, the federal government's crackpot drug war has turned cops into drug thugs as they pursue an insane, inhumane, ideologically driven policy of cracking down on seriously sick people who use doctor-prescribed marijuana to treat the chronic pain and nausea of cancer, AIDS, multiple sclerosis, polio, and other harsh illnesses.

Two years ago, nine armed members of a DEA task force raided Don Nord's home in Hayden, Colorado, arresting him and seizing his three marijuana plants. Nord is no drug dealer—he's a disabled, wheelchair-bound, 57-year-old man battling kidney cancer, diabetes, lung disease, and other problems. He was not toking on reefer for a joy ride, but using the marijuana under a doctor's supervision as a medical necessity.

Meet Suzanne Pfeil. She is paralyzed by post-polio syndrome and was under the care of WAAM, the Wo/Men's Alliance for Medical Marijuana in Santa Cruz, California. In 2002, she was awakened by five DEA agents pointing automatic rifles at her head. WAAM is a non-commercial medical co-op that, with the blessing of local officials, maintained a marijuana garden at its hospice to treat its 225 members, 85% of whom were terminally ill. In the early hours of September 5, the DEA burst in. They terrified the patients, charged two with violating federal drug law, ripped up the coop's garden, handcuffed WAAM's two founders, and took them to jail.

This was too much even for the arch-conservative editors of the *Orange County Register*, who called DEA's actions "an unwarranted and extreme operation against sick people...Such cruel raids suggest that a law that can be used to terrorize

sick people is in need of reconsideration." But Washington—under Democratic administrations as well as Republican—has done nothing to stop the stupidity, instead continuing to sanction such extremism in the name of looking tough in the drug war. Last year on June 15, for example, Congress voted 264-161 against allowing the ill to use this proven treatment.

These people are nuts...and dangerous. Luckily, though, there's sanity among grassroots folks. Polls constantly show overwhelming support for laws to let the sick use doctor-prescribed marijuana. The latest Gallup survey shows 78% of Americans backing such common sense. Lest you think that's a lot of blue-state, smoke-induced, exhippie sentiment talking, independent polls in the deep red states of Alabama and Texas register three-to-one margins in favor of medical marijuana, *including 67% support among Texas Republicans!*

More significantly, when given a chance, people are voting their convictions. Led by the Marijuana Policy Project, coalitions of doctors, nurses, and patients have come together to raise common sense to high places. Defying the furious fulminations and fervid opposition of assorted drug czars from Washington, voters in 11 states and numerous cities have already approved the medical use of marijuana by compelling margins. Let's do a brief roll call:

- In 2004, while Bush was easily winning the majority of Montana voters, those same people approved by a two-to-one margin a medical marijuana initiative that the White House had adamantly opposed.
- In 2003, Maryland Governor Robert Ehrlich became the first

Republican head of state to sign medical marijuana into law. This came in the face of ferocious campaigning by the White House drug czar to get Ehrlich to veto the bill. Flexing his ignorance, the czar told Marylanders that marijuana was "medicinal crack."

- This year, Rhode Island became the 11th common-sense state when more than three-fifths of legislators voted to override the Republican governor's veto of a bill to protect medical-marijuana patients from arrest. The bill had passed 30-0 in the senate, 52-10 in the house.
- In Michigan, cities are taking the initiative. In the past two years, Detroit okayed marijuana use by a 60-40 vote, Ann Arbor by 74-26, Ferndale by 61-39, and Traverse City by 63-37.

The power is ours

On big issue after big issue—such as dramatically cutting the greenhouse gases that cause global warming, declaring energy independence with a crash program of renewable energy and conservation, bringing the troops home from Bush's war of lies in Iraq, and giving Americans relief from the price gouging of drug companies—Washington has become the enemy. But rather than wring our hands about that, we can roll up our sleeves and join hands with the grassroots groups that are taking action on these problems and making progress. Congress and presidential candidates are too corrupted or too cowardly to lead our country back to its democratic ideals. We have to lead ourselves—and there is opportunity for you to be part of the renewal right where you live.

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STATES, CITIES GO FOR LIVING WAGE, CLEAN ELECTIONS AND MEDICAL POT

- 1 Pentagon & companies are spying on us
- 2 What we can learn from the cows
- 3 Local action on global warming
- 4 Pentagon says troops unprotected