

In This Issue:

Turow at TDU	1	Congress Watch	3
Political Comedy	1	Power Lunch	4
Internship Rewards	2	Healthcare	4
Torture	2	Dirty Coal	5

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Scott Turow Ponders the Question: *Is "Government Ethics in Illinois" An Oxymoron?*

by Carol Hillsberg



Scott Turow, the distinguished attorney and author of seven best sellers, has the ironic distinction of being former Governor Rod Blagojevich's first ethics appointment. In 2003

the Illinois Executive Ethics Commission was formed to deal with the systemic problem of corruption here in Illinois. Mr. Turow earned his reformer credentials when, as an assistant U.S. Attorney, he was lead counsel in a number of trials connected to Operation Greylord. Because of this successful investigation and prosecution of the Illinois judiciary in the 1980s, the prevailing joke at the time no longer resonates. No longer does a judge call the two opposing attorneys into chambers, place two envelopes with the same amount of bribe money in them on the table, and declare, shrugging his shoulders, that now he will have to decide the case on its merits.

But that was then, and this is now. As he explained to the capacity crowd at his May 14 Tenth Dems University class, *Government Ethics In Illinois: An Oxymoron?*, Prof. Turow perceives

continued on page 6



Tenth News

JUNE 2009

Illinois Tenth Congressional District Democrats Newsletter

Volume 6, Edition 6

Aaron Freeman Tutors Overflow TDU Class in the Art of Political Comedy

by Barbara Altman and Terry Jones

On Thursday night, April 30, the Deerfield Public Library became the stage for several suburban "Second City" troupes as, under the tutelage of Aaron Freeman, a Tenth Dems U class overflowing with grassroots political activists tried to learn how to be funny.

Presenting the course, *Political Humor—How to Be Funny, Get Attention, and Vice Versa*, comedian Aaron Freeman began, aptly enough, with some jokes. Then began the serious business of being funny. Freeman asked those of us fortunate to be part of his over-subscribed course to think about what made the jokes funny. He posited that optimism is an important aspect of comedy. Human beings laugh because we are the only animals that know the difference between the way things are and the way things should be. Comedy is a way of looking at life that makes happy endings seem inevitable.

Freeman also analyzed humor that "plays against it." To illustrate, he sought a volunteer to talk about something he hated and explain why. Then, he asked the same volunteer to explain why he loved that very thing he'd just said he hated. And the volunteer was funny! So Prof. Freeman put the class to work. We were divided into small groups and tasked with concocting a political advocacy organization that stood for an idea we found generally reprehensible. Each group had to name their new organization and develop three talking points to make our "case" with the audience.

As each group's representative took a turn at the microphone, the assembled Tenth Dems bore witness to as frightening an array of organizations—and spokespersons—as has ever been featured on Fox News.



TDU Professor Aaron Freeman gives Mary LaPlante the opportunity to make her case for a particularly reprehensible political advocacy group.

One group, for example, touted themselves as Progressives for Influenza Growth, also known as Pigs R Us, favoring the spread of swine flu to stimulate the economy. Medical stocks would rise, they asserted, and social distancing measures would promote the growth of the automobile industry as riders fled public transportation for the sterile isolation of their own vehicles.

continued on page 6

The Rewards of a Tenth Dems Summer Internship

by Lauren Miller

This summer will be my first as an intern for the Tenth Dems. As a high school student going into my junior year, my summer job prospects were not very exciting. Whether babysitting, camp counseling, or dog walking, working seemed just an activity that would get in the way of going to the beach.

This opportunity, however, is very different from any of those activities. Interning at Tenth Dems is fast-paced, exciting, and more educational than any school course. What average high school student can say that she assisted a politician, organized volunteers, or worked on a website over the summer? This is a unique opportunity that allows every intern and volunteer to truly make a tangible difference in his or her local community.

In addition to all of the excitement and opportunities that interning offers, there are many more reasons why volunteering for Tenth Dems is so rewarding. I have noticed that many of my high school peers are shockingly unaware of what is going on in the world. As members of a generation that will inherit many complicated political issues, it is crucial that we learn to understand what is going on around us. This

job gives me an inside look into how our government's policies work, and into how they affect our daily lives. Becoming informed and educated is critical to our working together to make a difference. While helping candidates and citizens to get their voices heard is the main goal of this grassroots organization, most people don't realize that those of us who volunteer to help get so much back—especially knowledge and experience.

The recent presidential election was a key influence on many of the people volunteering at political offices this summer. President Obama inspired young people everywhere with his call to make a difference. He motivated us to get involved with our communities because anyone can be influential, despite age, gender, or cultural background. His refreshing campaign and message of unity encouraged me to get involved and see what I could do to encourage local change.

So why help Tenth Dems? It is a fantastic group of people who advocate support of Democratic leaders all over the Illinois 10th Congressional District. Every volunteer is appreciated and does work that influences positive action around the 10th District. Interning is my way of helping out and having a summer experience that will teach me more than I could ever imagine.

The Politics of Torture

by Steve Sheffey

President Obama is being criticized by both the left (for not investigating interrogators) and the right (for releasing CIA memos) for his positions on torture—perhaps the surest sign that, once again, his judgment is sound.

According to *The New York Times*, President Obama said the Justice Department would have to decide whether the lawyers who authorized the interrogation methods should face charges, while pledging that interrogators would not be investigated or prosecuted for using techniques that the lawyers said were legal.

A threshold question is whether torture, such as waterboarding, works. Sen. John McCain, who should know, says that waterboarding is torture. McCain believes that torture is ineffective because the victim will say anything to make it stop. If empirical evidence shows that torture does not work, then there is no justification for torture.

But what if torture does work? What if using torture will elicit otherwise unavailable information that could save lives, perhaps thousands of lives? Those are big "ifs." We cannot condone torture without hard evidence that contradicts Sen. McCain's first-hand observations. As others have pointed out, in a "ticking time bomb scenario" torture may be even less effective, because the subject could give some answer, any answer, to stop the torture, knowing that he or she would only have to hold out for a short time.

But if torture does work, the question becomes whether it is good public policy in any circumstances. (Another question is what we mean by "torture." Almost by definition, torture must be unacceptable, a problem some attempt to solve by redefining torture to their liking.)

No country has been victimized by terrorism more than Israel. Former Israel Supreme Court President Aharon Barak wrote that the fate of democracy is that "not all means are acceptable to it, and not all methods employed by its enemies are open to it. Sometimes, a democracy must fight with one hand tied behind its back. Nonetheless, it has the upper hand. Preserving the rule of law and recognition of individual liberties constitute an important component of its understanding of security. At the end of the day, they strengthen its

spirit and strength and allow it to overcome its difficulties."

And yet Barak also recognizes that there must be a balance: "Democratic nations should conduct the struggle against terrorism with a proper balance between two conflicting values and principles. On one hand, we must consider the values and principles relating to the security of the state and its citizens. Human rights are not a stage for national destruction; they cannot justify undermining national security in every case and in all circumstances. Similarly, a constitution is not a prescription for national suicide. But on the other hand, we must consider the values and principles relating to human dignity and freedom. National security cannot justify undermining human rights in every case and under all circumstances. National security does not grant an unlimited license to harm the individual. Democratic nations must find a balance between these conflicting values and principles.

"Any balance that is struck between security and freedom will impose certain limitations on both. A proper balance will not be achieved when human rights are fully protected, as if there were no terrorism. Similarly, a proper balance will not be achieved when national security is afforded full protection, as if there were no human rights. The balance and compromise are the price of democracy."

But none of this means that torture is acceptable, although, to a certain extent, some civil liberties may in some circumstances be curtailed. By releasing the CIA memos, President Obama has allowed an essential debate about whether torture is effective and under what circumstances it should be permitted to begin. Obama is right to open the possibility that the lawyers who wrote legal memos authorizing



continued on page 7

Mark Kirk Unveils Sham Legislation to Kill Healthcare Reform

Given Mark Kirk's penchant for duplicity, he must be having the time of his life helping his party attempt to block healthcare reform.

On May 20, Kirk, along with co-author and co-sponsor Charlie Dent (R-PA), unveiled proposed legislation bearing the Orwellian title "The Medical Rights Act." Sponsored by Kirk, Dent, and 11 other Republican Congressmen, the bill proposes to guarantee that private healthcare cannot be denied by government restrictions. It also bans government interference in the patient-doctor relationship (except in cases like Terri Schiavo's).

Like many other Kirk-sponsored legislative proposals, the Medical Rights Act (MRA) is deceptive. It does exactly the opposite of what it pretends to do. As outlined in a press release (text is as yet unavailable), the bill is carefully crafted to appear to protect patients' rights to affordable, quality healthcare while it actually is aimed at prolonging the insurance industry's ability to deny patients this basic human right. (See http://www.house.gov/apps/list/press/il10_kirk/healthcare_release.html.) Its core purpose is to counteract flaws in the president's anticipated healthcare reform proposal, but the press release refers not to any provisions in any presidential or Democratic healthcare bill but to anecdotes and skewed statistics relating to the Canadian, British, and European healthcare systems.

Essentially, Kirk sets up a straw man—healthcare reform that will interfere with the doctor-patient relationship—and then topples the straw man by purporting to protect rights (to medical choices) that were never in danger. Worse still, buried in the legislation is a provision that repeals the longstanding prohibition against physicians billing Medicare beneficiaries for services covered by the Medicare program. Under current law, a physician must accept Medicare's reimbursement as full payment for any service furnished to a Medicare beneficiary. This longstanding protection of Medicare beneficiaries against "balance billing" is the last feature of our current healthcare system that needs reforming.

The MRA bears one other striking resemblance to other Kirk legislative proposals: it appears to have been designed more as a PR tool—to grab media attention and broadcast Republican talking points—than as a serious proposal aimed at becoming law. It's clearly part of a much broader Republican strategy to use misinformation and scare tactics to block reform of America's broken healthcare system.

The architect of this strategy is Republican spinmeister Dr. Frank Luntz—the man who crafted the language used to promote a preemptive war in Iraq and to underplay the severity of global warming. (See "Senator Merkley-Words Designed to Kill Health Care Reform," May 7, Huffington Post, <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jeff-merkley/words-designed-to-kill->



he_b_199373.html.) The strategy, as crafted by Luntz, aims to scare the American public into believing that government-run healthcare would deny Americans control over their medical care by eliminating their choice of doctor and causing long waits for lifesaving medical procedures.

In his now infamous article "The Language of Healthcare 2009" (http://www.pnhp.org/news/2009/may/frank_luntzs_the_l.php), Luntz instructs Republicans to be vocally and passionately on the side of reform. "If the argument becomes President Obama is on the side of reform and Republicans are against it, the battle is lost," he wrote. "Republicans must be for the right kind of reform that protects the quality of healthcare for all Americans."

Who better than Mark Kirk, himself a master at doublespeak, to implement Luntz's strategy? Kirk's May 20 press release introducing the MRA—now the centerpiece of his website—could have been written by Luntz himself. Some bloggers, in fact, have speculated that Luntz ghost-wrote it. (See "Medical Rights Act: New Legislation Ghost-Authored by Frank Luntz," <http://mediamattersaction.org/blog/200905210004>.)

Following Luntz's instructions to a tee, Kirk's press release repeatedly characterizes the MRA's sponsors as on the side of healthcare reform. "President Obama rightly placed healthcare reform among his top priorities for this Congress," it says. It then carefully frames the bill's objectives in the context of the president's goals: "In March, President Obama outlined three principles for health care reform: lower costs, increased choice, and expanded access. The Medical Rights Act strengthens these goals while adding safeguards to protect the doctor-patient relationship and improve American medicine."

Having set the stage, Kirk's press release gets to its main objective of disseminating misinformation and fabricated horror stories about government-run healthcare programs in Canada and the UK to scare the American public. The irony, of course, is that most of the problems it points to in the Canadian and UK programs—i.e., long waits, denial of medical treatment, and healthcare rationing—exist to a much greater degree in the U.S. under the current private insurance system and are major factors in calls for reform.

In the end, it's clear that Kirk

The Republicans' 10 Rules For Stopping the "Washington Takeover" of Healthcare

by Dr. Frank I. Luntz

1. Humanize your approach.
2. Acknowledge the "crisis" or suffer the consequences.
3. "Time" is the government healthcare killer.
4. The arguments against the Democrats' healthcare plan must center around "politicians," "bureaucrats," and "Washington"...not the free market, tax incentives, or competition.
5. The healthcare denial horror stories from Canada & Co. do resonate, but you have to humanize them.
6. Healthcare quality = "getting the treatment you need, when you need it."
7. One-size-does-NOT-fit-all.
8. WASTE, FRAUD, and ABUSE are your best targets for how to bring down costs.
9. Americans will expect the government to look out for those who truly can't afford healthcare.
10. It's not enough to just say what you're against. You have to tell them what you're for.

Source: Physicians for a National Health Care Program, http://www.pnhp.org/news/2009/may/frank_luntzs_the_l.php

continued on page 8

White House Insiders and Chicagoans Valerie Jarrett and Tina Chen Featured Speakers at 8th Annual Ultimate Women's Power Lunch

by Barbara Altman

A capacity crowd of 1,937 joined Tenth Dems's neighbor to the south, Illinois 9th District Rep. Jan Schakowsky, on May 11 at her 8th annual "Ultimate Women's Power Lunch." Featured speakers included Chicagoans Valerie Jarrett, Senior Advisor and Assistant to the President for Intergovernmental Affairs and Public Liaison, and Tina Chen, White House Public Liaison on Ms. Jarrett's staff. They regaled attendees with stories about their new lives in Washington. Preceding them at the podium was Minnesota Senator Amy Klobuchar, who provided some humorous insight into what it's like to be a U.S. Senator and a woman.

Rather than take turns at the podium giving speeches, Jarrett and Chen chose to sit on the dais and "interview" one another. The relaxed format allowed them to convey through anecdotes the heady experience of serving their country from the West Wing of the White House. Each woman confessed to continuing to feel a thrill every time her car passes through the White House gates on the way to work. Another thrilling moment Ms. Chen evoked was a recent ceremony at which she swore in new U.S. citizens, all of whom were active duty military personnel.

The goal of public liaison is to bring "the people" into government. The constituency of the Office of Public Liaison—recently renamed the Office of Public Engagement—is "everyone *except* elected officials." Urban affairs, neglected by past administrations, is an important part of the office's mission.

Also within this office's bailiwick is the White House Council for

Women and Girls, whose goal is to integrate women's issues among all executive departments. To ensure that such integration starts at the top, all cabinet officers are members of this council.

One of Ms. Chen's jobs is, in preparation for President Obama's town halls and similar trips, to find local citizens who will be touched by whatever initiative the president is promoting at the time. Likewise, these officials bring to the White House citizens who have never been there before. As one of the speakers quipped, they have been bringing to the White House people who previously never got closer than "protesting outside the gate."

Sen. Klobuchar warmed up the crowd with her own anecdotes about being a Washington "power woman." She claimed to have raised \$17,000 for her senate campaign from "former boyfriends," a source she acknowledged was "not an expanding base." And she delighted in sharing the moment she ran into her husband near the Capitol, with a wrapped gift under his arm—on his way to join other Senate spouses at a baby shower for Sen. Jim Webb's wife.

Rep. Schakowsky's own brief remarks included her acknowledgment that she has been considering a 2010 bid for the senate seat currently occupied by Roland Burris. She reported that 80 percent of her constituents supported her running. However, she expressed some reluctance to leave the House after accruing seniority that places her on key committees and has earned her a place in the Democratic House leadership as a member of the Steering and Policy Committee and a Chief Deputy Whip. She promised that an announcement of her decision whether or not to run for the senate would come by June 8.

Quality Healthcare: So Many Questions — So Few Answers

by Sharon Sanders

This isn't just about healthcare reform. The same questions I'm asking will hit us smack in the face with or without reform. What reform will do is speed up the process of questioning the moral, financial, and ethical aspects of change.

As healthcare reform in one form or another becomes a likelihood in this session of Congress, we will have to start the debate not only on the cost to our economy of such a revolutionary change in healthcare delivery, but also on the ethics and costs of some of our most common procedures.

The end-of-life debate will be one of the biggest discussions. For example, your elderly mother is on her deathbed, but your family is offered several procedures, costly ones, that will prolong her life for a few months, procedures that will have little effect on her quality of life but will result in enormous costs to the healthcare system. What do you do? Who should make the decisions: the dying patient, the family, or the medical team? These are heart-wrenching decisions that are made over and over again in this country every day but now will become even more critical. The "typical" approach to end-of-life decision-making involves the caregiver team and patient surrogates, who will have to be involved at every step. We will have to find ethical formulas for maintaining a quality-of-death as well as quality-of-life response. Respect for patient autonomy and the intention to honor decisions to decline unwanted treatments will have to be looked at more closely. The right to die may be reevaluated.

In the United States, we have allowed the costs of unending care to be incurred—often needlessly—yet in other industrialized countries, hospice with dignity and without pain has become the answer much sooner in the end-of-life debate.

And it won't be just end-of-life issues that will need to be considered. To what extent should efforts be made to keep premature, critically ill, or severely handicapped newborns alive? How many times should we do bypass surgery, knee and hip replacements, and hundreds of other modern-day procedures that may or may not be necessary or improve the quality of life? We may even need to think about the length of chemotherapy for cancer patients and whether it adds to quality of life.

Skyrocketing costs, often unjustified, will cause us to reassess our values and decision-making procedures. Regardless of whether we actually get healthcare reform now, the spiraling, out-of-control costs will soon force the debate. We need to look at the efficacy of many of the drugs and costly procedures we're now using.

How far should research go in the search for a healthier and longer life? Studies have to be looked at more carefully to see if there is adequate return on the costs. Should the government pay for preventative healthcare? How should we determine administrative costs or production costs of pharmaceuticals and various implantable devices? What about heart and kidney replacement? Does the research show they are cost effective or extend and improve the lives of those who receive them? Is it ethical to spend hundreds of millions of dollars on advertising pharmaceuticals in magazines, newspapers, and on television that is aimed at the potential patient? Is it ethical to sell drugs directly to the doctors using incentives such as free lunches, parties, and other carrots? Studies need to be done completely independent of the companies producing such medical and pharmaceutical equipment to determine unbiased success rates of any given product.

continued on page 8

Coal is NOT Clean! Coal is Dirty!

by George Rosenblit

This article is the first in a series examining existing and alternative sources of energy to generate electric power.

I recently saw an ad on CNN that stated "Coal is Clean." First, I was surprised that CNN would air that myth. Then, I became very upset that so many uninformed people would believe it.

Coal is dirty, from mining to final use in electric power generating, every step of the way. And there is no proven process for making coal clean (by removing carbon dioxide—a gas that is released into the atmosphere and is a major contributor to global warming). Clean Coal is pie in the sky. Let's examine the methods, environmental impacts, and human toll in the process necessary for using coal to generate electric power.

Coal is mined underground or by mountaintop removal.

(See http://www.bydesign.com/fossilfuels/links/html/coal/coal_get.html.)

The Coal Information Network is very informative in describing underground mining. There are more than 1,000 underground mines in the United States. Much of our best coal is still underground. In 1980 there were more than 220,000 coal miners in the country. Today there are fewer than 100,000. But while 1980 production was about 800,000 tons, today we produce over 1 billion tons with fewer than half the number of miners.

The Coal Information Network also states that "coal mining is heavily regulated, both for safety and environmental impact, by the states and the federal government." The regulations may be there, but they are largely ignored.

Have you ever seen pictures of coal miners with head lamps and black faces covered with coal dust? Inhaling this dust causes black lung, a debilitating disease that causes many miners to die prematurely, in their 40s.

The *Courier-Journal* of Louisville, Kentucky published an article entitled, "Miners keep dying despite federal laws." (See <http://www.courier-journal.com/cjextra/blacklung/index.html>.)

The stories of miners with black lung disease are heart-breaking. Recommendations for improving mine safety standards have been consistently opposed by the mining industry and also by the federal Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA). Unbelievable!

A *Courier-Journal* investigation in 1998 disclosed widespread cheating by mine operators and miners on testing for the amount of dust in mine air samples. Yet more than nine years after a federal report of recommendations for mine safety was issued, virtually all of the key proposals have been ignored, and at least 7,600 more miners have died of black lung.

The focus on safety changed when George W. Bush replaced Bill Clinton as president. The work of the congressional investigative committee created during the Clinton administration, and efforts to implement its recommendations, stalled after Bush took office in 2001. U.S. Labor Secretary Elaine Chao, a member of President Bush's cabinet, ignored the plight of the coal miners.

In 2003, the MSHA brazenly proposed a regulation that would have had the effect of actually increasing as much as fourfold the legal



concentrations of coal dust! Who was paying off whom?

What is Mountaintop Removal Mining?

Mountaintop removal/valley fill coal mining (MTR) transforms some of the most biologically diverse temperate forests in the world into biologically barren moonscapes. (See <http://www.mountainjustice.org/facts/steps.php>.)

Forests are clear-cut, topsoil is scraped away, giant machines then scoop out millions of tons of "overburden," and all of this is dumped into adjacent valleys. Wildlife habitats are destroyed and vegetation loss often leads to floods and landslides. Next, explosives up to 100 times as strong as the ones that tore open the Oklahoma City Federal building blast up to 800 feet off mountaintops. Explosions can cause damage to home foundations and wells. "Fly rock," more aptly named fly boulder, can rain off mountains, endangering area residents' lives and homes.

Coal companies are supposed to reclaim land, but all too often mine sites are left stripped and bare. Even where attempts to replant vegetation have been made, the mountain is never again returned to its healthy state.

Giant machines then scoop out the layers of coal. The washing of coal often results in thousands of gallons of contaminated water that looks like black sludge and contains toxic chemicals and heavy metals. The sludge, or slurry, is often contained behind earthen dams in huge sludge ponds. One of these ponds broke on February 26, 1972, above the community of Buffalo Creek in southern West Virginia. Pittston Coal Company had been warned that the dam was dangerous but did nothing. Heavy rain caused the pond to fill up, and it breached the dam, sending a wall of black water into the valley below. Over 132 million gallons of black wastewater raged through the valley. 125 people were killed, 1100 more were injured, and 4000 people were left homeless. Over 1000 cars and trucks were destroyed, and the disaster did \$50 million damage.

The coal company called it an "act of God." This is but one example of the heartless, irresponsible, and callous attitude of coal companies toward human beings and the environment.

Bush received millions of dollars from the coal industry during his 2000 election campaign. One of Bush's big supporters in West Virginia, James "Buck" Harless (a Bush "Pioneer"), who raised \$250,000 for Bush, had a private audience with the president at Bush's Texas ranch.

continued on page 7

Political Comedy at TDU *continued from page 1*

Send our Seniors, or SOS, advocated reinstating the draft, but for senior citizens only, arguing, in part, that their loss in combat would be far less traumatic to the nation than the lives of young men and women. Drafting the elderly would have economic benefits as well, removing some of the financial burden from Medicare and Social Security and opening up key jobs, like Walmart greeter, to younger people with families to support. Drafting the elderly would also save lives by reducing the number of automobile accidents on the home front – especially in Florida. Grandpa Sam Wants You!



Two of the advocacy groups focused on the environment. The Lake Michigan Development Commission preached, "Use it or lose it." The group advocated tapping Lake Michigan's unfulfilled potential by dumping garbage in the lake. This could lead to further economic development from selling "pre-fertilized" water to farmers in western states suffering from drought. ACT, the Anti-Conservation Team, also stood up for pollution by proposing more use of plastic bags. Building



more factories to produce this petroleum-based product would help the economy, and government could increase revenues by fining those who use canvas bags. Best of all, the landfill mounds created by the disposal of this glut of plastic bags would improve the topography of Illinois.

The nation's culture wars became fodder for a pair of advocacy groups. The Coalition Against Marriage's spokespersons, Elizabeth Hasselback and Antonin Scalia, advocated a law banning all marriage. Such a law, they claimed, would eliminate discrimination against gays once and for all. It would also put those blankety-blank divorce lawyers out of work. And finally, We Are the Religious Right, or WARR, came out with strong support for religious fundamentalism. WARR's policies would save on education spending, as there would be no need for science labs, or even textbooks. Its spokesperson invited others to join the group "and do the thinking for us."

Although none of us is expecting a call from Jon Stewart or Stephen Colbert anytime soon, every group got some laughs. And we came away from a delightful evening with a better understanding of the science, as well as the art, of political comedy.



Clusters of TDU students and stand-up comedy wannabes collaborate on the evening's assignment. As they brainstorm to create political interest groups and develop talking points, Prof. Aaron Freeman circulates among them.



Turow at TDU

continued from page 1

three persistent themes that underlie the widespread corruption in Illinois government today: abuse of political contributions, abuse of state employees, and abuse by industries with long histories of corruption. In Turow's opinion, this systemic problem persists because Illinois is in dire need of campaign finance reform. Our state is one of only four that have no limits on the amounts of money that can be given to any public figure. The most



Scott Turow poses with Tenth Dems interns Jennifer Bitoy, Jessica Werley, Ben Seitelman, and Andy Bookman.

A POLITICAL PARTY SCHOOL

significant result of this absence of limits is that House Speaker Mike Madigan controls the vast Democratic war chest. To quote Carol Marin in the *Chicago Sun Times*, May 24, 2009, "Mess with Madigan and he can crush you politically." Because of Mike Madigan's power, and because that power rests in part on unregulated campaign contributions, the prospects for significant reform in Illinois

continued on page 8

The Obama administration has announced moves to reverse the Bush administration's devastating last-minute weakening of the stream buffer zone rule, a key protection for waterways near mountaintop removal coal mines. (See <http://sierraclub.typepad.com/compass/2009/04/bush-rule-on-mountaintop-removal-coal-mining-reversed.html>.) The move comes in response to a legal challenge by a coalition of organizations including the Sierra Club.

Electric Power Plants

There are 21 coal fired electric power-generating plants in Illinois, and two more are on the drawing boards. When the coal is burned, it spews toxic sulfur dioxide and mercury into the air, as well as carbon dioxide, which is a key contributor to global warming.

Sulfur dioxide forms sulfuric acid in the presence of moisture, which causes acid rain.

Mercury forms methyl mercury in Lake Michigan, and in rivers and streams. It enters the fish food chain, and then we ingest the poison when we eat the fish.

These plants are not a clean source of energy. This type of plant bears responsibility for 30 percent of greenhouse gas pollution in the United States, and it imposes both economic and human health costs on our society.

Health harms from coal-fired power plant emissions cause asthma and other chronic respiratory ailments. A Clean Air Task Force study found that "Fine particle pollution from U.S. power plants cuts short the lives of nearly 24,000 people each year."

Duke Energy and other ACCCE (American Coalition for Clean Coal Electricity) companies are spending millions to maintain the status quo while convincing people that the coal and utility industries want change. Yet no matter how much is spent on talk, without real investments in CCS (carbon capture and storage) technology research and development—and binding greenhouse gas reductions to create future industry certainty—coal will still be dirty. Meanwhile, atmospheric greenhouse gas levels grow, ice sheets melt, and hurricanes become more ferocious.

The Coal Ash Time Bomb

One of the worst environmental disasters in recent memory unfolded in Kingston, Tennessee, where a massive coal ash spill unleashed over a billion gallons of potentially toxic sludge into the Clinch River and surrounding land. (See *Tennessee Coal Ash Disaster Dwarfs Exxon Spill*, December 30, 2008, <http://earthfirst.com/tennessee-coal-ash-disaster-dwarfs-exxon-spill/>.)

Worst yet, the Tennessee Valley Authority—the nation's largest government-owned utility, which owns the plant where the spill occurred—failed to properly warn residents in the area of the toxins the sludge contains.

The spill was nearly 50 times as big as the famous 1989 Exxon-Valdez spill in Alaska. A wall holding back 80 acres of sludge from the TVA's Fossil Plant gave way. The sludge is a byproduct of the ash from coal combustion. A retention site at the Tennessee Valley Authority's power plant in Kingston contained the waste until a wall breached, sending the sludge downhill to damage 15 homes and cover at least 300 acres.

It will cost an estimated \$825 million to clean up this mess. Clearly, the societal costs of coal combustion will also be quite large. Nationwide, there are an estimated 600 similar coal ash storage facilities vulnerable to spills.

Coal ash contains heavy metals including arsenic, mercury, and lead. An EPA assessment found extremely high risks to human health and the environment from the disposal of coal ash in waste ponds and

landfills. The dust and airborne contaminants from the coal ash are dangerous. The way the TVA downplayed the effects is reprehensible.

Pie In The Sky

The coal industry's campaign to "make coal sexy again" has included every trick in the book—even a music video ad featuring supermodels dressed up as coal miners.

David Roberts, an environmental writer for Grist.com, has written a great critique of the coal industry's "clean coal" campaign, pointing out that "it's an obvious scam—easily exposed, easily debunked. Just because it's obvious, though, doesn't mean the media won't fall for it. The entire 'clean coal' propaganda push is premised on the media's gullibility." (See <http://www.prwatch.org/node/8096>.)

60 Minutes Confirms that the Clean Coal Smoke Screen Continues

In an interview with *60 Minutes* on April 26, 2009, James Rogers, CEO of Duke Energy, advocated a major program to research, develop, and deploy carbon capture storage technology to slash greenhouse gas pollution from coal-fired power plants. "But it's gonna take trillions of dollars to do it." Duke Energy has not invested any dollars in the technology to make clean coal a reality. (See http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2009/04/smoke_screen_continues.html/print.html.)

An analysis of the industry's investments found that companies spent less than two cents in research on "clean coal" for every \$1 of profit. And even though new legislation would fund technology to make clean coal a reality, ACCCE has yet to show any support for it.

President Obama supports investments to develop CCS (carbon capture storage) technology that would enable power plants to capture 85 percent or more of their carbon dioxide emissions and permanently store them underground in geological formations. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act will invest billions of dollars in such research.

It's pure bribery, and Congress is complicit. Data collected by the Center for Responsive Politics found that "Political action committees and individuals employed by ACCCE member firms, including many top executives, contributed \$15.6 million to federal campaigns in the 2008 election cycle—with a reach so wide that 87 percent of Congress received money." Total federal campaign spending by the coal mining and electric utility industries in 2008 was \$23.6 million.

CCS technology could take a decade or more to commercialize, if the method is proven feasible. In the meantime, ACCCE hopes to prevent adoption of any meaningful binding reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

Torture *continued from page 2*

torture might be prosecuted. "Following orders" is not a moral defense to egregious conduct. However, given the nature of the enemy and what appeared to the interrogators to be legal justification, one wonders on what grounds the interrogators could be prosecuted, assuming (and this is a big assumption) that the interrogators acted within the scope of their authority. If they did not act within the scope of their authority, or if their conduct was so egregious that they should have known it was against the law, then they should be prosecuted.

If torture or harsh interrogation can be justified at all, it can only be justified on a case-by-case basis. We must consider who the prisoner is, what he or she might know, what the threat is, and what methods will be used. Yet in the absence of any evidence that torture has ever produced information that could not have been produced by other means, it is difficult to imagine circumstances under which torture could be justified as necessary when balancing the needs of state security against the need of the democratic state to safeguard the rule of law that it exists to uphold.

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Healthcare *continued from page 4*

As we move toward an initially expensive healthcare plan where everyone is guaranteed affordable care, be it private or government-subsidized, we will have to find numerous ways to cut the extraordinary expenses involved and ultimately force reasonable, realistic competition. We will have to confront the powers that be, the administrators of insurance companies, pharmaceutical companies, testing research companies, nursing homes, hospitals, and ultimately the doctors themselves. We will also have to test our will against a media that is supported by these same medical-related corporations. How do we counteract their powerful scare tactics that are telling people they will have to wait for weeks, even months, to see a doctor?

And once we do pass a new healthcare system, be it single-payer, universal, or the private/public option, will we be able to attract young doctors, or the ones we already have, back into the practice of internal medicine or general care? We're losing so many of our doctors to the various specialties every month. Will they return when there is possibly less paper work and quicker payments? Will they enter general practice even if the salaries are not as large as they once were?

Hundreds of thousands of Americans are losing their jobs each month and receiving continuing unemployment benefits. Fewer and fewer of them are seeing a chance to return to a livable wage in the workplace. Will they continue to unintentionally drain the country of much-needed income to pay for healthcare reform?

Yet, with all the questions and very few answers, needlessly skyrocketing medical costs have made reform the only viable answer to putting this country back on track. We certainly don't have all or most of the answers yet. Everyone will have to do their

share, be it paying a little more or getting a little less for a while, but it will be outweighed by competition to lower costs down the road, and it will give all Americans the opportunity to buy into a quality, affordable health insurance plan that can move with an employee from job to job. With all the unanswered questions, some type of competition-based, government involved, quality reform still seems to be our best option.

Congress Watch *continued from page 3*

and Dent's MRA and the press release announcing it are both part of the overall Republican strategy to use scare tactics to stop healthcare reform in its tracks. The only good news for Democrats is that the bill is likely to go exactly where every other piece of Kirk-sponsored legislation has gone: nowhere.

Turow *continued from page 6*

are dim. Mr. Turow doesn't know for sure what will come out of the "sausage grinder" in Springfield, but he predicts that there will be so many exceptions and trapdoors in the final legislation that the result will be no meaningful law at all.

However, a groundswell of opposition to the status quo can make a difference. We should vow not to vote for legislators if they fail to enact campaign financing reforms. All 177 members of the State Assembly and one-third of the 59-member Senate are up for re-election in 2010. We, the voters, pay their salaries. We have the power to send legislators back to Springfield, or not. The message Scott Turow left with the Tenth Dems University audience is that our representatives need to hear from us voters and thus be empowered to enact real reform.