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RIGHT WING REPUBLICANS USE BUDGET DEBATE TO ADVANCE IDEOLOGICAL AGENDA

After five days of rigorous debate, the House of Representatives passed its version of HR 1, the continuing appropriations bill, which funds non-defense discretionary spending through September 30, 2011. The bill passed the House in the early morning hours of Friday, February 18. The vote was a nearly straight party line 235 - 189. Not a single Democrat voted for it, and only three Republican Representatives, Jeff Flake (R-Ariz.), Walter Jones (R-NC) and John Campbell (R-Calif.), crossed the aisle to vote against it.

Under the guise of fiscal responsibility, House Republicans used the negotiations over discretionary spending as a platform for advancing their all-encompassing, regressive agenda



to dismantle American democracy. The goals of that agenda, as evidenced in the proposed budget cuts, are to shrink government; weaken civil liberties and constitutional rights; deny women the right to reproductive healthcare and choice; bust labor unions; dismantle environmental protections; defund last

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Tenth News

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With Friends Like These by Ron Levitsky

Recently, I wrote a letter for Amnesty International's Urgent Action Network. It's a simple act, inspired by what I learned as a child about the ideals of American democracy. One of that last generation to graduate high school before the Vietnam War, I'd accepted without question the values our nation purports to represent. And so I wrote this letter on behalf of a physician detained since 2007 and allegedly subjected to brutal tortures. His "crime" was circulating a petition that called for the establishment of an independent human rights organization in his country.

Unfortunately, the nation that arrested him is Saudi Arabia, one of our allies.

The popular uprising against a decidedly unpopular dictator in Egypt brings urgency to a consideration of the dichotomy between our nation's professed beliefs and its frequently contradictory actions.

Iran is an earlier example of this dichotomy, as noted in Stephen Kinzer's *Overthrow: America's Century of Regime Change from Hawaii to Iraq*. In 1951 the Iranian Parliament, under its democratically elected Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh, voted unanimously to nationalize the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, which for fifty years had been controlled by the British government. This was done about the same time that Great Britain nationalized its own coal and steel industries. Mossadegh, who wanted to use



the increased revenue to benefit the Iranian people, was *Time Magazine's* 1951 "Man of the Year." However, the British convinced Secretary of State John Foster Dulles "that Mossadegh was leading Iran toward Communism." Dulles ordered the CIA to work with the British to plan a coup.

After several missteps, the CIA used hundreds of thousands of dollars to bribe journalists and members of the Iranian parliament, spread lies, and incite demonstrations and riots in the streets of

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Friends Like These *continued from page 1*

Tehran. Finally, soldiers who were part of the plot attacked Mossadegh's house, forcing him to flee. In place of a democratic government, Mohammad Reza Shah became undisputed ruler of Iran. The CIA helped to train the Shah's hated secret police, SAVAK, to crush any democratic opposition. This was the same Shah whom the Iranian people overthrew in 1979, when street demonstrations eerily similar to the recent ones in Egypt led to the Ayatollah Khomeini's theocracy and Iran's ongoing enmity with the United States.

To counteract the growing power of Iran, the U.S. backed Saddam Hussein in the 1980s Iraq-Iran War. Saddam used chemical weapons, first against the Iranians, and later against his own Kurdish citizens. Given our government's later fears regarding Saddam's supposed cache of chemical weapons, one would have expected a similar concern at that time. However, Saddam, who committed mass murder against his own people, was our ally. Our government responded with skepticism to reports of civilians being gassed, in effect assisting Iraqi denials. As Samantha Power notes in her book on genocide, *A Problem from Hell*, "The American responses to Iraqi chemical weapons' use against Iran, early reports of use against the Kurds, and ongoing Iraqi bulldozing of Kurdish villages was extremely tame." She refers to the results as a "Kurdish Hiroshima."

And now comes Egypt, a nation that had been ruled for the past 30 years by Hosni Mubarak, who had never allowed a free election. Egypt's freedom of the press is rated 127/178 by Reporters Without Borders, and its government has constantly been cited by Amnesty International for acts of repression against its own citizens.

Over the years, how did the United States react to this dictatorship? It gave this leader of the "moderate" Arab world \$1.5 billion annually in foreign aid, second only to Israel. In return, it used Egypt, buying its loyalty in the first Gulf War. Worse, Egypt has been a favorite destination of extraordinary (i.e., illegal) rendition, the policy of kidnapping suspected enemies of our nation and sending them to foreign countries that aren't required to follow American law regarding the use of torture.

During the Clinton administration, suspected terrorists were abducted from Croatia, Albania, and Bulgaria and sent to Egypt. According to a *Frontline* report, several of these men were tortured and executed without trial. In 2003, the CIA abducted Hassan Mustafa Osama Nasr (Abu Omar) in Milan, Italy, and took him to Egypt where he was interrogated and allegedly tortured. Omar Suleiman, Mubarak's vice president, was Egypt's liaison for the CIA's rendition program.

But as we use dictatorships like Saudi Arabia and Egypt, so do they use us. In his article, "When Bush Caved to Egypt," former "W" speechwriter Matt Latimer recalled a moment when President Bush had become frustrated with Mubarak for holding up Bush's dream of democratic reform in the Middle East. Bush also was upset with the imprisonment of Ayman Nour, who had challenged Mubarak in a presidential election. In response, Latimer wrote a tough speech for Bush to give at the 2008 World Economic Forum held in Egypt. However, before traveling to Egypt, the Bush entourage stopped at Saudi Arabia where the Saudis, through sumptuous entertainment, flattery, and words of caution,



Photo Credit: Flickr - monasosh

convinced Bush to soften his speech considerably. Bush only spoke of the "hope" of reform. There was no mention of Ayman Nour, who actually spent an additional nine months in prison beyond his original sentence.

Latimer concludes, "The Obama administration seems to think the pragmatic, prudent approach is warranted in response to the mass protests in Egypt. But think how different George W. Bush might look to many Egyptians today if he had given the speech he probably wanted to give three years ago."

Dictators a generation ago, such as Diem of South Vietnam or Mobutu of Zaire, were supported by the U.S. government, which saw them not as oppressors and betrayers of the ideals Americans hold dear, but rather as necessary alternatives to Communism. In the 1980s, Saddam Hussein, who mass-murdered his own people, was viewed as a counterweight to Iranian hegemony in the region. Now Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Egypt play the same game—as allies in our war on terror, even though thousands of anti-American recruits for Osama Bin Laden and his ilk come from these very nations. London's *Financial Times* called this a "Faustian bargain" and urged the U.S. to offer its support instead to popular democratic movements, such as the one that opposed Mubarak.

That Mubarak finally stepped down is a tribute to the people of Egypt, not the United States.

American foreign policy wasn't always contrary to American ideals. President Grover Cleveland refused to support the annexation of Hawaii because the majority of the native population opposed the coup against their queen. In his Fourteen Points, Woodrow Wilson asserted that all people had the right to self-

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Right Wing Republicans *continued from page 1*

year's historic healthcare reform legislation; eliminate access to information by defunding public broadcasting and the National Endowment to the Arts; dismantle regulations governing financial and commodities markets' and weaken law enforcement and other government functions critical to public health, safety, and financial well-being.

The entire budget battle "is a sham," Paul Krugman explained in his February 17, *New York Times* op-ed column "Willie Sutton Wept." The non-security discretionary spending items included in the appropriations bill account for a mere 12 percent of the federal budget. No matter how much is cut from this "small sliver," it's not going to make a dent in the U.S. budget deficit. Meanwhile, Krugman says, "House Republicans are literally stealing food from the mouths of babes — nutritional aid to pregnant women and very young children is one of the items on their cutting block — so they can pose, falsely, as deficit hawks."

To further their anti-democratic objectives, Republican leaders called for \$61 million in cuts in funding for the Environmental Protection Agency; public broadcasting; the National Labor Relations Board, and the National Endowment for the Arts. The final bill eliminates entirely all funding for last year's landmark healthcare legislation, the Affordable Care Act. And in a startling blow to women's rights, it eliminates funding for Planned Parenthood. In the midst of all this, new 10th District Congressman Robert Dold seemed to be striving to strike a balance between voting with his party's right wing leaders on key amendments while also trying to appear to be in sync with the more centrist values of his constituents. In walking this tightrope, Dold voted with his party for the four amendments that together defund the Affordable Care Act (H. Amdt. 102, 103, 105, and 106). He also supported multiple

amendments aimed at slashing spending on environmental protections, including:

- H. Amendment 88, which prohibits the financing that would fund the Environmental Protection Agency's enactment of a law limiting pollution from cement plants.
- H. Amendment 47, which reduces Environmental Protection Agency's Greenhouse Gas Registry by \$8.5 million.
- H. Amendment 31, which eliminates financing for the Energy Department's Advanced Research Projects Agency-Energy, a clean-energy innovation program.

Dold also voted with his party for an amendment to stop the FCC from enforcing new "net neutrality" regulations. The regulations were adopted by the FCC to prevent operators from discriminating against traffic on their network and from blocking lawful content, services, applications, or devices on their network. Many believe net neutrality is essential for maintaining current freedoms. See "No Tolls on the Internet," by Lawrence Lessing and Robert W. McChesney, *The Washington Post*, June 8, 2006 (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/06/07/AR2006060702108.html>).

The final House bill achieved its goal of slashing \$61 million in spending over the five-month period ending September 30, 2011. Fortunately, it has virtually no chance of becoming law as it's expected to face strong opposition in the Senate where Democrats still hold a majority. President Obama also has said he will veto the bill in its current form. But time for a healthy debate is running out, and there is mounting concern that legislators' inability to reach a compromise will lead to a government shutdown, putting more stress on the already fragile economic recovery. Explains Krugman, "Slashing spending while the economy is still deeply depressed is a recipe for slower economic growth, which means lower tax receipts—so any deficit reduction from G.O.P. cuts would be at least partly offset by lower revenue," proving once again, it's not really about the deficit. **TD**

What's at Stake in Wisconsin?

By Gilbert Feldman

Wisconsin's new governor, Scott Walker, and a sizable, newly-elected Republican majority in both houses of the state legislature are pushing a bill that would render public employee unions impotent. It would bar collective bargaining except on wages (with any increase limited by the consumer price index), bar dues deductions, eliminate the unions' right to charge nonmembers for the cost of the unions' being legally required to bargain for them, limit contracts to one year, and require a recertification vote every year. The proposed legislation would double employees' costs for their contributions for healthcare and would add significantly to their payments for pension benefits, resulting, in effect, in an 8 percent pay cut.

Such a union-busting effort is unprecedented in recent decades. President Obama has termed it an "assault on labor unions." Public employee unions already have taken significant reductions in their pay and benefits to assist in resolving budgetary problems. They have agreed to negotiate additional financial concessions but have refused to accept elimination of collective bargaining rights. Walker has refused to talk to them, insisting on passage of his plan without change. He declares that this action is necessary to balance the state budget.

Walker's claim of a fiscal crisis is clearly pretextual. Wisconsin is not facing a crisis and need not experience a deficit for three years. Last month, Walker and his legislature gave away \$117 million in tax breaks, which, according to the state's Legislative Fiscal Bureau, eliminated a surplus that would otherwise have been enjoyed. Wisconsin is in much better fiscal shape than most other states. And the new bill exempts from coverage the police and fire unions that supported Walker's candidacy.

So what is going on? The news media generally interpret Walker's action as a union-busting device thinly portrayed as a response to a fiscal problem. But the facts suggest much more is at stake. The Republican Party hopes that success in Wisconsin will assure the defeat of President Obama in 2012 and conversion of the Democratic Party into a minority party.

Similar legislative action is pending in Ohio, Florida, Indiana, Michigan and Tennessee, also states in which Republicans gained control of both the legislative and executive branches in 2010. By making Wisconsin the lead state in this concerted action, the GOP is taking a significant gamble: the risk of electoral backlash balanced

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Why I May Run for Congress

by Ilya Sheyman

Over the past nine years, we've organized together to try to fix a broken education funding system in Illinois that leaves far too many children behind. We've marched together arm-in-arm to oppose a war in Iraq that never should have been waged. We've rallied together against massive taxpayer bailouts for the big banks on Wall Street. And we've spoken out together for a real investment in the health, well-being, and dreams of everyday people on our Main Streets.

So when I hear the talk coming out of Washington, D.C., about reducing Social Security, giving tax breaks to the wealthiest Americans, and cutting core services that our communities depend on, I know I'm not alone in thinking that too many of our elected officials seem to have forgotten that politics and government are supposed to be about doing good for people: helping every man, woman, and child with a dream, and the willingness to work for it, to achieve their full potential.

During the last three months, I've had the privilege of meeting many of you in my travels around the 10th district: launching a new Community Connection Center in Waukegan and attending church services in North Chicago; participating in a State of the Union Watch Party in Palatine and enjoying pizza at a New Trier Democrats' party in Wilmette; learning from a discussion on Israel at a congregation in Deerfield and bowling at a winter party in Highwood. And, of course, listening to you in countless homes and coffee shops from Buffalo Grove to Highland Park, Lake Forest to Lake Bluff, Northbrook to Arlington Heights—and just about everywhere in between.

Through it all, I've heard your plea for a different kind of politics that asks each of us to reinvest in our civic and political lives, to organize, and to actually fight for what we believe in.

That's why I'm launching an Exploratory Committee for Congress right here in Illinois' 10th Congressional District.

This is not a step to take lightly. I set off on this endeavor with clear eyes and a keen awareness that running a truly people-powered campaign for our shared progressive values will be no easy task. If we undertake this campaign, we'll be met at every step by the same cynics and entrenched special interests who have always stood in the way of real change.

But my own life story as a first-generation Jewish immigrant in America tells me that the American dream is worth fighting for. My own journey was only possible due to both my family's hard work and perseverance AND the generous support of our community and government. That's the America I know—and that's the America we have an obligation to pass on to future generations.

This is no time for timidity or triangulation. We need real leaders who are willing to speak up for the progressive values that will make a difference in people's daily lives—and mobilize the American people to our cause.

Over the next month, I hope to have the opportunity to listen to you, to hear your stories, and to learn from your experiences—to see if, together, we can build a people-powered movement for meaningful change that reflects the hopes and aspirations of everyday Americans from Waukegan to Highland Park, Palatine to North Chicago, and Wilmette to Buffalo Grove.

Are you excited to see a new generation of bold, progressive leadership in Washington, D.C.—and are you willing to fight for it? Please visit my website to let me know and share your feedback:

<http://www.ilyasheyman.com>

Let's make this the moment when we once again dare to believe! **TD**

The Rally in Madison and Governor Walker's Clone

by Sharon Sanders

The Republicans are making a concerted effort to take over full control of this country. The Wisconsin issue, from Governor Scott Walker's point of view, is not so much about concern with our rights to collective bargaining as it is about assuring that unions are unable to finance Democratic candidates while the Right spends hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars on right-wing and libertarian candidates – enabled by *Citizens United*. As the days go by, I'm more and more convinced that that's exactly what's happening. Republicans despise workers' rights, but they also know that by not allowing unions they are removing a Democratic revenue source.

Phyllis Goldman and I went to Madison on Friday, February 18, to support teachers and other workers whose rights to collective bargaining are in jeopardy because of the shenanigans of Governor Walker, one of about six Republican governors and many more state legislatures chomping at the bit to take away all workers' rights. These are also the elected officials directly supported by the efforts of such people and groups as Dick Armey,

Karl Rove, Rupert Murdoch, the Heritage Foundation, the Club for Growth, and, particularly, the Koch brothers and their incredible wealth. The Koch brothers, who inherited most of their billions and have done much to harm the environment, are the same ones who have worked so hard to convince those on the Right that our planet is in fine shape and that there is no such thing as global warming. The Kochs have had everything handed to them and have no idea what average people have to suffer as their jobs are eliminated or shipped overseas. Under the protection of *Citizens United*, the Koch brothers have come out of their holes to blatantly take ownership of our country. They are footing the bill for all of this hatred.

Phyllis and I arrived in the city and decided to first have lunch near the Capitol rotunda. We went to my favorite bar and grille and sat at the bar. There were so many young people we felt old, yet also young just being around them. We kidded for a minute or so about how much fun it would be to be picked up. No sooner had we said that than a middle-aged man sauntered up to us and

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Two Pieces by Jack Altschuler

Let's put two apparently individual pieces together and then see what kind of picture they make.

The wealth disparity in the U.S. continues to expand. Big money people are becoming even wealthier while millions become poorer, unemployed, or underemployed.

A recalculation of the national employment situation provides a useful view of how extensive the suffering is. Add to the 9.4 percent who are unemployed those who are underemployed and those who, in frustration, have given up looking for a job and we have an employment crisis number around 20 percent. If there are about 154 million Americans wanting full time work, then there are about 30 million Americans with job and income woes.

Don't let that large number be just a statistic to you; those are real flesh and blood human beings who are suffering. We humans are hard-wired to protect our families, yet millions cannot do that and are trapped in helplessness as so many lose their homes and their dignity. When people in dire circumstances see others living in lavish circumstances, they have a way of becoming quite resentful.

Worse, the system that produced this situation is permanent.

There will be no reining in of Wall Street recklessness, or prosecutions for law breaking, and there will be no meaningful regulation or slicing up of those "too big to fail" institutions.

There will be no overhaul of the tax codes or of the subsidy systems for energy companies and other businesses that help the rich get richer.

Those things will not change as long as laws are made by people who are funded by those who benefit from the system as it is. Deep Throat said it clearly: Follow the money. You'll see the connectivity.

That's one piece. Here's the second.

We will continue to fund our war-making capabilities as though we will always be at war because we will be, even if it's just another absurd invasion of Grenada. The munitions industry beast must be fed, and those in power paint all who oppose it as unpatriotic.

And, because restarting a military draft is politically impossible and our military needs exceed the manpower available, we will continue to hire "contractors." They form a huge, privately owned shadow army that we've created because of our political cowardice.

That is the second piece. Now let's join the pieces.

The enormously wealthy are in control of a country with unprecedented military might. The rest of its citizens are politically

manipulated by misleading statements and outright lies that get them to vote against their own best interests. They even stand by as national elections are stolen. That cannot continue forever as people will eventually catch on and refuse to accept dishonesty that hurts them.

Take a look at Tunisia, Yemen, and now Egypt. Their people are protesting because of desperation over the wealth disparity, their inability to care for their families, and heavy-handed political manipulation and dishonesty propped up by the military. An Egyptian woman interviewed on television said it plainly: "We want freedom, and we want our dignity." That sounds more than a little like Americans who are suffering from un- and under-employment woes right now, as well as the angry rants of the Tea Party members.



Photo Credit: Flickr - peasap

In each case, in the Middle East countries and in America, there are huge numbers of people living in desperate circumstances. Every one of those people wants what that Egyptian woman talked about, and they don't want to be manipulated by the rich. Increasingly dire circumstances eventually lead to anger, and that always comes out, as is happening in Egypt right now.

When that happens it is a direct and existential threat to those in power, who have both volunteer and shadow military might at their disposal to maintain the status quo. Putting those pieces together makes for a very bad picture.

We're not at a tipping point in America yet, but there are strong similarities here to what we see on the world stage, and we may be moving in a similar direction.

Perhaps things will be different here. Be clear, though, that we are headed for sea changes in how we think about America, our duties to one another, and, most significantly, how our systems should work. And those in power always resist change. **TD**

President Obama: Pro-Israel at the Two-Year Mark by Steve Sheffey

After two years, it is clear that none of the flights of fancy imagined by our Republican friends about President Barack Obama's fitness for office have come to pass. Obama's record after two years in office is outstanding from a pro-Israel perspective.

He has created an unprecedented level of military cooperation between the United States and Israel. Most important, he's done more than any other president to thwart Iran's illicit nuclear ambitions.

Thanks to Obama, Iran is now further away from acquiring nuclear weapons than it was when he took office, not only because of U.S. and international sanctions against Iran, but also because a joint American and Israeli effort to undermine Iran's efforts to make an atomic bomb through the Stuxnet computer worm wiped out a fifth of Iran's nuclear centrifuges and significantly delayed Iran's nuclear efforts.

The Obama administration supports Israel in word and deed. *Haaretz* reported on January 13 that in a combative exchange with an Al-Jazeera reporter in Doha Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said that "Israel is a sovereign country and it makes its own decisions. . . . You often make decisions based on your own experiences and history. And when the Israelis pulled out of Lebanon they got Hezbollah and 40,000 rockets and when they pulled out of Gaza they got Hamas and 20,000 rockets." That's Clinton speaking to Al-Jazeera, not staunch supporters of Israel.

Time and time again, President Obama stands with Israel. Obama fulfilled his campaign promise to boycott the Durban II conference. Obama renewed sanctions against Syria several times. Obama fully funded the Arrow 3 ballistic missile system and the Iron Dome system. Obama provided more security assistance to Israel than any president in history. Obama maintained the U.S. policy of ambiguity on Israel's nuclear weapons. Obama told the Arab world in Cairo that America's bond with Israel is "unbreakable." Obama reapplied loan guarantees to Israel.

Obama has repeatedly condemned Palestinian incitement against Israel and attempts to delegitimize Israel. In late November 2010, the State Department responded to the Palestinian Authority's denial that the Western Wall was Jewish by saying that "We strongly condemn these comments and fully reject them as factually incorrect, insensitive and highly provocative. We have repeatedly raised with the Palestinian Authority leadership the need to consistently combat all forms of de-legitimization of Israel including denying historic Jewish connections to the land."

Obama pulled out of joint exercises with Turkey after Turkey excluded Israel. Obama repealed import tariffs on Israeli dairy products. Obama restored Israel's qualitative military edge and took U.S. military cooperation to unprecedented levels after erosion during the Bush administration.

As Daniel Shapiro, President Obama's Senior Director for the Middle East and North Africa National Security Council, explained on May 3, 2010:

"This commitment to Israel's security is not a slogan for us. We live it every day in the policies we carry out. Since taking office, President Obama has taken what was already a strong U.S.-Israel defense relationship, and broadened and deepened it across the board. Our annual military assistance to Israel has increased to nearly \$3 billion. We have reinvigorated defense cooperation, including on missile defense, highlighted by the 1,000 U.S. service members who traveled



to Israel to participate in the Juniper Cobra military exercises last fall. We have intensive dialogues and exchanges with Israel — in political, military, and intelligence channels — on regional security issues and counter-terrorism, from which we both benefit, and which enable us to coordinate our strategies whenever possible. We have redoubled our efforts to ensure Israel's Qualitative Military Edge in the region, which has been publicly recognized and appreciated by numerous senior Israeli security officials. And we continue to support the development

of Israeli missile defense systems, such as Arrow and David's Sling, to upgrade Patriot missile defense systems first deployed during the Gulf War, and to work cooperatively with Israel on an advanced radar system to provide early warning of incoming missiles.

"The ties between our defense establishments are extraordinary. Throughout the U.S. military and the IDF, from Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Adm. Mike Mullen and IDF Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi, down to generals, colonels, and majors in every branch, personal relationships have been forged, joint work is being done, and a sense of common purpose and shared mission animates the partnership.

"We take these steps because the threats Israel faces are real, and because many of the same forces threaten us and our interests. Whether it is an Iran bent on acquiring nuclear weapons, Hezbollah acquiring increasingly sophisticated weaponry from Syria, or Hamas smuggling weapons through the tunnels into Gaza, Israelis stand on the front lines, often at great cost, against forces that seek to take the Middle East in a lawless, dangerous, and unstable direction, putting our interests at risk. When President Obama wrote recently that 'our alliance with Israel serves our national security interests', and that 'no wedge will be driven between us,' this is what he was talking about.

"President Obama has also steadfastly defended Israel against attempts to de-legitimize it, whether at the UN or other international bodies, while always standing up for Israel's right to self-defense against terrorism and other threats. These are commitments that will not change. When it became clear that the Durban II Conference would unfairly and unreasonably single out Israel for criticism, we did not hesitate to pull out of the conference and lead many of our allies to do the same. We have repeatedly and vigorously voted against and spoken out against the Goldstone Report. When Turkey summarily cancelled Israel's participation in a key military exercise last fall, we did not hesitate for one minute to pull out as well, and we have worked diligently to preserve a positive relationship between

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YES, We Did by Robert P. Watson, Ph.D., Lynn University

Recognizing that although there are disappointments in the Obama administration, many actions have been forgotten or have gone unnoticed. The following is the second in a series of noteworthy accomplishments that should be remembered, keeping in mind that the list is a work in progress.

GOVERNANCE

- The White House website now provides information on all economic stimulus projects and spending, along with an unprecedented amount of information on our government (2009)
- Obama ended the Bush-era practice of circumventing established FDA rules for political reasons (2009)
- Obama ended the Bush-era practice of having White House staff rewrite the findings of scientific and environmental regulations and reports when they disagreed with the results (2009)
- Obama limited the salaries of senior White House aides (salaries cut to \$100,000) (2009)
- Obama has urged Congress to adopt "Pay-Go" (whereby each dollar of spending is offset by a dollar in cuts or revenues, which was used in the '90s but abandoned in the '00s) (2010)
- Obama has been holding open meetings with Republican leaders, although they complain of a lack of access and information (2010)
- Obama signed the Improper Payments Elimination and Recovery Act, legislation to curb wasteful spending (2010)
- Obama tasked federal agencies to develop plans for disposing of unneeded real estate and then to eliminate unnecessary or non-economical lands, properties, etc. (2010) **TD**



Photo Credit: Flickr - creativedc

My Address to the 112th Congress by Jack Altschuler

Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleagues.

I recently stopped at Tom & Rich's Barber Shop in Northbrook, Illinois to get a trim. Rich has been cutting my hair since I was a boy and on this visit I thought I'd have a little fun with him.



Photo Credit: Flickr - VinothChandar

"Rich," I said, "you've been cutting my hair for a long time."

"Yes, it's been a while," he said.

"I think it's been since I was about 14. You've given me a lot of haircuts over the years."

"Yes, I have," he agreed.

"In fact," I said, "you're pretty much the only one who has cut my hair for all these years, and look at what's happened." And I pointed to my bald head. For reasons he didn't explain, he accepted no responsibility for my slick dome.

The last congress spent a great deal of time posturing over the Park51 site where New York City Muslims wanted to build an Islamic community center. The hue and cry was over the fact that those who want to build are Muslims and the Park51 site is close to Ground Zero. Somehow, those who objected to the center conflated the people who wanted to build it plus those who would use it with those who perpetrated the attack on the twin towers. That leap of logic is beyond sense (or possibly below sense) and it's a bit like me accusing my barber Rich of causing me to go bald.

History is replete with examples of whole classes of people being demonized because one person did something bad – or it was imagined that one person did something bad. Somehow we humans have a way of extending one experience to all. That isn't just unfair to everyone; it's even self-destructive.

If we can get past the level of superstition where a black cat crossing one's path and something going wrong the next day are connected into cause and effect in our minds, then we have a chance of ending our foolish sideshows and getting down to the business of solving America's problems.

To do that will require that we stop demonizing Muslims, gays, and others and stop forsaking old people and sick people. Worse, it will require you to abandon believing that anyone who doesn't agree with you is unpatriotic and stupid. Are you up to it?

Garrett to Hold Job Growth Hearings Throughout Illinois *by Sally Thomas*

Senator Susan Garrett, Democrat, Illinois State Senate representing the 29th District, Chairman of the State Commerce Committee

As part of an effort by the Tenth Congressional District Democrats we are seeking to highlight our democratic representatives and to allow them the opportunity to talk about ongoing or new initiatives they are working on. This month, we chose state Senator Susan Garrett and her initiative as Commerce Committee chair to hold a series of hearings throughout the state to foster business and job growth. The first of these meetings, entitled "Fostering more new business in Illinois: How can business, government, and academia work together to improve our state's economy?" was held on Friday, February 18th, at the James R. Thompson Center in Chicago.

Question: Where do you think the state is now in terms of our economy?

Sen. Garrett: The state is facing significant challenges, and I think that we have been too focused on a one-size-fits-all approach. We need to focus on job creation and make that a priority and take a proactive approach. We also need to look at what programs are not absolutely essential and maybe freeze such programs for the time being in order to reduce expenditures. Most importantly, we need to prioritize so the public understands the decisions. We need transparency.

Question: There has been talk on a national level about moves to make states discharge debt in bankruptcy. What is your opinion on this?

Sen. Garrett: I would prefer to try everything else first. I believe that if we take very specific steps to reduce expenditures and are transparent as to our reasons for doing so, we won't need such an option.

Question: As you know, foreclosure has been a particular problem in Illinois. What have you seen at the state level regarding foreclosures?

Sen. Garrett: We have done a lot in the senate to reform how

banks conduct foreclosures. We have implemented programs that slow down the process and have provided counseling to homeowners at risk of foreclosure. Unfortunately, I believe that banks lured people into purchasing who did not have adequate income. Our office has personally gotten involved in several foreclosures in order to delay the banks and work out a solution.

Question: What is your vision on the economy?

Sen. Garrett: We need to move forward with reductions in expenditures, but we also need to push for job creation and retention in Illinois. For example, in Lake County we have seen businesses moving to Wisconsin, such as Uline, a package supply company, which recently moved its headquarters to Wisconsin. Even Abbott Labs has been purchasing land in Wisconsin and slowly moving across the border. As a border county, we need to be especially aware of what is attracting businesses to Wisconsin and what Illinois can do to stop this loss.

Question: Do you think that the tax increases have something to do with these businesses leaving?

Sen. Garrett: I did not support the tax increases. However, it is difficult to know exactly what drives such decisions. In terms of Uline I believe that it wasn't the only factor but was the straw that broke the camel's back. Part of what I would like to find out from businesses is what matters to them. What can Illinois do to make it a better environment for their growth? For example, we are bringing in academics to these hearings, together with business leaders, to see if the academic classes line up with the needs of the employers. What Illinois needs is to stop losing jobs to neighbor states and to bring in new businesses for job growth. We cannot wait for the economy to turn around on its own.

For more information about the upcoming meetings visit Senator Garrett's website at <http://www.garrett98.com> or she can be reached at her Highwood office 847/433-2002, or e-mail ilsenate29@sbcglobal.net. **TD**

Rally in Madison *continued from page 4*

ordered a drink. He asked us where we were from, and I had the feeling he was trying to get a handle on how many people had "crossed the border." It turned out he was one of Gov. Walker's right-hand men. He said, "I'm incognito; out of my usual suit and tie." The more he drank, the more he revealed his true feelings. He opined that we're in trouble because 40 percent of our citizens don't pay taxes and they're overprotected by unions and benefits. We shot back with, "Twenty percent are unemployed and have no income to pay taxes on because of the policies during the Bush years that everyone should own a home whether they could afford it or not; these bad loans were then sold all over the world as AAA investments by Wall Street—and then everything fell apart." Then this comment, which I hear all the time: "The corporations are paying 35 percent in taxes." You can talk until you're blue in the face about the fact that most of the big corporations have offshore write-offs and other tax loopholes, and pay nowhere near

that, if any at all, but they stick with the same speech, just like the statement that all teachers are making upwards of \$100,000 plus benefits. Then he let us know that the problems all started with Carter, Clinton, and finally, Obama. No matter that Bush came into office with a surplus. The truth doesn't count. He "revealed" to us that President Obama is a Communist, and he had "proof," which was basically that he was trained by Saul Alinsky. I said, "From my vantage point, he's a right-of-center conservative Democrat." We asked him why Walker planned to call out the National Guard, and he said that he was only going to call them out to the prisons if those state-employed, unionized security guards walked off the job.

Then he warned that the crowds might get rowdy. I said, We told him that our crowds don't get rowdy, and that the only rowdiness I've seen is at Democratic town hall meetings when the Tea Partiers showed up, particularly one in which they screamed and yelled at a congresswoman and called her every name in the book. We said we had been to an awful lot of rallies held by

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Subj: A Month of Connections

by Ilya Sheyman

As February draws to a close, we wanted to share a quick update on the work of the Tenth Dems Community Connection Center (ComCon) in the northern part of the 10th District.

Ever since January's 200-person launch event, volunteers from across the District have been diving into brand new community-building initiatives, reaching out to allies within the community, and celebrating all that downtown Waukegan has to offer.

Read the TribLocal's coverage of our Grand Opening and Strategy Meeting at: <http://bit.ly/eAe73g>

It's been a whirlwind month, and here are a just a few of the highlights:

- **Serving the community:** The ComCon steering team has been inundated with great ideas. This month, a group of Waukegan High School students and local leaders came together to brainstorm possible scholarships and mentoring services for students needing a helping hand to get into college. A team is also sketching out an interview-training workshop for folks coming out of the criminal justice system. Others are hard at work developing a spring Poetry Slam contest for local high school students.

We're planning a training session for new volunteers on Saturday, March 5th from 1 to 3 PM. If you're interested in coming out to visit



or help out at the Community Connection Center, please contact us here by email or call 847-266-VOTE (8683).

- **Reaching out:** Volunteers from ComCon have been spotted everywhere in the community this month! Most recently, we celebrated Black History Month at a luncheon together with Waukegan Township and the Lake County NAACP, and spread the word about ComCon at a monthly meeting of the Coalición Latinos Unidos de Lake County.

And our outreach team is continuing to meet with local elected officials, community leaders, and groups to identify shared goals and opportunities for collaboration to best serve the community.

- **Enjoying downtown Waukegan:** What better way to spend a Saturday night than laughing together with 45 progressive

friends? On Saturday, February 12, Tenth Dems from across the district came out for a night of progressive politics to support the Community Connection Center, eat delicious local food at Jerry's Tacos, and enjoy comedy at the Lewis Black show at the historic Genesee Theatre.

Violet Ricker, the Executive Director of Waukegan Main Street, joined us for dinner and discussed the opportunities to get

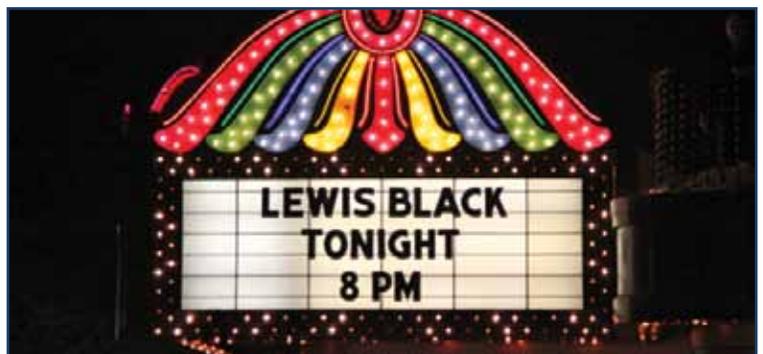


involved in supporting local businesses and organizations in the downtown Waukegan community.

We're planning our next night out to see the laugh-out-loud author David Sedaris at the Genesee Theatre on Wednesday, April 6 at 7:30 PM. Please email us at events@tenthdems.org or call 847-266-VOTE (8683) if you're interested in attending

There are no government grants or funds to support this program, so we need your help to keep the ComCon up and running. In order to create an efficient office environment, we are asking for stationery supplies, printer paper, laptops, and some furnishings, especially a small desk, bookcases, floor lamps, and area rugs. Be a part of this exciting new project. Search your attic and give what you can!

ComCon exists because politics should be about more than just elections. It should be about making our community a better place to live. It should be about connecting people who share common dreams. It should be about working together. **TD**



Obama *continued from page 6*

Israel and Turkey, which has been an important contributor to security in the region.”

There’s one thing that Israel’s enemies and Obama’s critics have in common: an unrelenting, almost monomaniacal focus on Israel’s settlement policy. For better or worse, Obama has maintained the same policy on settlements that the United States has maintained since 1967. Unless we’re prepared to label every president since 1967 as unsympathetic to Israel, we should not single out President Obama.

We can disagree with Obama on specific policies or tactics, as we have with every president, but Republicans don’t do the U.S.-Israel relationship any favors when they question Obama’s commitment to Israel for continuing American policies that have been in place for decades.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu noted on November 9 that the “disagreements with the U.S. over Jerusalem are well-known. They are not new and have continued for 40 years.” These differences are apparently not well-known to those who would use Israel for partisan purposes to advance the political fortunes of the Republican Party, but those of us who genuinely care about peace in the Middle East and a strong U.S.-Israel relationship should stress that this is and has been American policy, and is not unique to any one president.

The Bush administration also publicly opposed settlements and building in Jerusalem. Not only that, but the Bush administration demanded that the ban on settlement growth include “natural growth” in its roadmap for peace. Every Democratic and Republican president since 1967 has failed to move the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem. The Jerusalem Embassy Act of 1995 requires that the U.S. embassy be moved to Jerusalem unless the president signs a waiver every six months, which is just what Presidents Clinton, Bush, and Obama (thus far) have done.

But only President Obama went to Cairo and told the Arab and Muslim world that America’s bond with Israel is “unbreakable.” He told the Arab and Muslim world, a world rife with Holocaust denial, that to deny the Holocaust is “baseless, ignorant, and hateful.” He told them that threatening Israel with destruction is “deeply wrong.” He said that “Palestinians must abandon violence” and that “it is a sign of neither courage nor power to shoot rockets at sleeping children, or to blow up old women on a bus.” And he said that “ Hamas must put an end to violence, recognize past agreements, and recognize Israel’s right to exist.”

Who knows where we’d be today if previous presidents had had the courage to personally deliver this message on Arab soil.

History will deliver the final verdict on Obama once he’s completed his second term. But if the case went to the jury now, the verdict would be clear: Obama is a strong friend of Israel, and he’s proven it in word and deed. **TD**

At Stake *continued from page 3*

against the chance for a potentially great reward. Wisconsin is a very blue state, the birthplace of public employee unions. Unions provide not only funding for Democrats but, more important, the human power that does the groundwork in election campaigns. Private sector unions have been greatly weakened by outsourcing and technological change, and public employee unions today are the base and bulwark of the Democratic Party. Other states

Rally in Madison *continued from page 8*

Democrats and progressives, and we had never once seen one turn violent.” He just stared. The anger grew as the number of “shots” grew, so Phyllis and I thought it was just the right time to go march with our compatriots. He was only important because he reflected the views of the man he worked for—Governor Walker. As we walked toward the door, Jesse Jackson and his entourage entered. I told one of his bodyguards that the man sitting at the end of the bar might be just the one for Mr. Jackson to talk to. I doubt it happened.

We walked around the rotunda as the crowds grew in number. It was cold and windy, and no one knew where it all was going to end. The Democratic senators who left the state to prevent a quorum will have to come back at some point. But more important, this is part of a massive move by the Koch brothers and others to put all unions out of business and leave the workers without safety nets or reasonable pay. They intend to defeat healthcare, remove benefits, decimate Social Security, privatize the school systems, and continue to destroy the environment. And unfortunately, they plan to do this state by state, as well as at the federal level. **TD**

Friends Like These *continued from page 2*

determination. European diplomats mocked Wilson behind his back and ignored the aspirations of millions of their fellow human beings in order to aggrandize their own empires. Yet our world, including the Middle East, is far worse because of their actions.

And there is something else to fear.

“A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure, permanently, half slave and half free. . . . It will become all one thing or all the other.” This, taken from Abraham Lincoln’s 1858 “House Divided” speech shows that Lincoln understood that slavery jeopardized the liberty of all Americans—not only economically but also in a moral sense. By the same token, the United States can’t truly subscribe to democratic values at home while supporting dictatorships abroad. We’ve already seen attacks on our own liberties by the overreaching Patriot Act, Arizona’s immigration law, the growing power of corporations to influence candidates and government officials, and a resort to violence instead of the democratic process to solve political questions.

At what point will people around the world be writing letters to free you and me from prison for exercising what the Founding Fathers believed to be our inalienable rights? Perhaps we have more in common with the Egyptian street protesters than we think. **TD**

would be much more receptive to this Republican initiative. But elimination of public employee labor unions as a powerful force in Wisconsin would make it virtually impossible for President Obama to be reelected. And if Wisconsin fell, other states that are easier conquests would soon follow.

This may be a fight to the death for American labor and the Democratic Party. I hope we are up to it. **TD**