



CONSERVATIVE BATTLELINE ONLINE

The "Bold Colors" Conservative Voice in Washington

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Food and Drug Warning

by Donald Devine

For all of its zaniness, Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* is chock full of wisdom. "One day, Alice came to a fork in the road and saw a Cheshire cat in a tree. 'Which road do I take?' she asked. 'Where do you want to go?' was his response. 'I don't know, Alice answered. Then, said the cat, it doesn't matter.'" It is often difficult to know where one should go.



The Food and Drug Administration has just proudly announced a revolutionary new warning label for the immensely popular anti-clotting blood thinner warfarin--cautioning that a lower dose "should be considered for patients with certain genetic variations."

Larry Lesko, director of FDA's clinical pharmacology office, presented gene warnings as a ground-breaking way to escape the agency's traditional generalist and reactive mode and begin tailoring government warnings directly to individual genetics. Until now genetic warnings have only been posted for a few limited-audience drugs, so warfarin is the first mass test. Research has been approved to extend the model to other popular drugs such as Prozac, metformin and albuterol. "If the potential wasn't huge, we wouldn't be doing it," the director boasted announcing the FDA's more active role promulgated this August.



Notice, however, that he says "potential." Professor Ann Wittkowsky of the University of Washington told the Wall Street Journal's Anna Wilde Matthews before the FDA's warfarin decision: "It would be irresponsible and potentially harmful to suggest that testing be used or even mentioned on the label. It is fascinating science but it is not yet ready for prime time."

The problem is that only certain variants of the genes CYP2C9 and VKORC1 seem to affect safe dosage and the FDA is not sure how much lower the dosage should be. Not only are genetic tests in their infancy and not conclusive, they cost from \$300 to \$500. There is concern from critics that patients will avoid the inconclusive tests because of the cost and time and then come back and sue the doctors and/or drug companies. So will doctors prescribe it? What could replace it? Warfarin was used as a low cost generic 30 million times last year.

Drugs are complicated things. Warfarin started as a rat poison. A military recruit tried to commit suicide with it but his use of a low dose that prevented blood coagulation led scientists to realize it could be useful as a human drug. When President Dwight Eisenhower was given permission to use it after his heart attack in 1955, warfarin became the most popular anti-clotting agent in history. Yet, too small or too large a dose can cause too much clotting or too much bleeding.

Doctors try to balance a person's size and age and test blood pressure frequently (often daily at the beginning) to get the dosage right. It is an art not a science. Warfarin is the second most likely drug to send a patient to an emergency room, after insulin. Yet, many more patients would suffer and even die without warfarin--and insulin—so physicians do not let the perfect be the enemy of the good and keep adjusting dosage.



The 2002 study of CYP2C9 complicated an already complex dosage problem when it found that this gene affects how people process warfarin and some variants of it appear to retain warfarin in the body and increase bleeding. The 2005 study of VKORC1 found that it too seemed to affect how much of the drug should be prescribed. But the findings are ambiguous.

The two genes—or “variants” of them--“appear” to make a difference. How much and how? No one knows. As Dr. Wittkowsky put it, gene research is not yet ready for such sophisticated dosage decision-making for individuals. There is a computer estimate of dosages when the genetic factors are evident but it is only one guess and is not accepted as authoritative.

Most important, it takes 10 days for the test and only two labs even do the studies, although others will join now that the government has acted. During those 10 days the expectation is that the older seat-of-the-pants method will be used. Or will doctors try to avoid lawsuits and wait to be certain, with increased risk from delayed treatment? Even then, nothing is certain since once the genes are found for an individual, it is still hit-and-miss on dosage.

So there are dangers any way one proceeds. It was a rat poison after all.

Gene therapy is complex too. Arthur Nienhuis, the president of the American Society of Gene Therapy says, “Gene therapy holds a great deal of potential” [there is that word again] but, after more than a decade of failure, a dozen children are now living normal lives after receiving gene injections. On the other hand, he admits there have been a handful of cases where gene therapy in volunteers caused leukemia. This past July, a 36 year old generally healthy Illinois woman with rheumatoid arthritis received a gene injection in her right knee to relieve local pain and died from an otherwise mild fungus and virus that became virulent and ravaged her organs and blood throughout her body. “It’s a major mystery,” concluded Kyle Hogarth, who heads the University of Chicago Medical Center, the hospital where she expired.

But the FDA is covered. The bureaucrats can say they gave the warning and it is up to the physicians, drug companies and medical professionals to deal with it. If they are sued because of the warning, that is their problem. It is perfect bureaucratize. The FDA warning is not in the key “black box” section at the top but in a less visible “Precautions” section below. The FDA even told the media to notice that the government did not directly recommend that doctors actually conduct the tests. Whatever this new policy actually is, it is not any more proactive than the old seat-of-the-pants process. The only absolute is that the government is safe whatever happens.

How about a new warning label? “The FDA exists because private underwriters could not guarantee perfect safety and the government promised it could. But perfect safety is a myth and the old market saying ‘let the buyer beware’ must still be the guide.” One can sue private underwriters but one cannot force government responsibility. China tries. Zheng Xiaoyu, the head of its FDA, was executed in July after he allowed tainted lead paint, juice additives, toothpaste and pet food to enter the marketplace. While a bullet to the back of the head does promote some kind of responsibility, it will not work either. Maybe government bureaucracy is not the solution.



Zheng Xiaoyu

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Editor**

Finally Vetoes?

by Paul Weyrich

Unlike his father, President George W. Bush sometimes is difficult to understand. However, one issue about which he has been resolute and consistent in recent times is taxes. In the past Bush did not veto higher spending bills. In his entire first term and well into his second President Bush did not veto a single bill. Even now he has vetoed only three bills, two of which would have expanded embryonic stem-cell research. His rationale for not exercising his veto power was that he did not want to quarrel with the first Republican Congress since 1995-1996. He let Congress get by with profligate spending until exasperated voters threw out the rascals in 2006.



Paul M. Weyrich

Now, however, the President is more serious. When he had a Congress which cut taxes every year he was in office, he did not veto spending. This year, with a Democratic 110 th Congress, Bush has said, "I will use the veto to keep your taxes low." He has promised to veto 9 of the 12 congressional spending bills. Bush said on August 8 "If the majority gets its way, American families, small businesses, will face a massive tax hike. It would amount to the largest tax increase in American history. Look, I recognize the Democrats control the Congress, and with it the power of the purse. I also have some power, and it is called the veto. And I have the votes in Congress to sustain vetoes, and therefore, I will use the veto to keep your taxes low and to keep federal spending under control." If only the President had thought this way when Congress was controlled by Republicans it likely would have remained Republican. Bush went on to say that, "Our economy prospers when we trust the American people with their own paychecks."

The President noted that since 2003 our economy has added more than 8.3 million new jobs and has had almost four years of uninterrupted growth. We continue to grow at a steady pace. Bush pointed out that tax cuts let the American people keep their own money, which stimulates entrepreneurship. Contrary to what Democrats preach, Bush said that when people earn more money tax revenues may rise. In 2007 "Tax revenues are expected to be \$167 billion higher than last year because the economy is growing."

Bush noted that, "Growing tax revenues combined with spending restraint has helped us drive down the federal deficit, and we were able to do so without raising taxes on the people who work, or without raising taxes on small business owners or farmers."

Bush averred that Democrats in Congress want to increase taxes and legislate additional government programs, "And I strongly oppose that approach."

Congress recently passed a budget resolution that includes an extra \$205 billion for discretionary programs over the next five years. "Now somebody is going to have to pay for it. And that, of course, will be the hardworking American people." Bush said that averages out to be \$112 million per day, \$4.7 million per hour, \$78,000 per minute. Put it another way, it's about \$1,300 in higher spending every second of every minute of every hour of every year for the next five years.

The President stated that that is why he will use his veto pen. He has threatened a veto of 48 bills passed since the Democrats assumed control of Congress. The first bill he may veto is State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), which narrowly passed in the House. When President Dwight D. Eisenhower suffered a humiliating defeat in 1954 he began to veto bills with a great fervor. Up to that point he had not. However, a top-heavy Democratic Congress upheld almost every veto. The present Democratic margins in both Houses of Congress are thin. There likely are insufficient votes to override a veto. Let us hope we have the opportunity to find out.

Paul M. Weyrich is Chairman and CEO of the Free Congress Foundation.

Harry Potter—Morality Or Decline?

by Spencer Warren

The finest example of a 'hero's journey' since Homer's *Odyssey*," in the words of Jenna Robinson in a column in the *Charlotte Observer*? Or "slop," the word applied to J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* books by the distinguished Yale literary critic Harold Bloom, who added that the prose is "heavy on cliché and makes no demands" upon the reader?

The first six of the planned seven books have made publishing history, with sales reaching 325 million worldwide, in 66 languages. It is claimed that two-thirds of all children in our country, and many of their parents, have read the books; U.S. sales numbered 121 million in July, before publication that month of what is supposed to be the final volume, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. And the film versions of the first five -- with the July release of *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* -- have enthralled enormous numbers of children of all ages: the first four films have grossed more than \$3.5 billion and the new release broke box-office records, bringing in \$44.8 million on its first day. The Potter phenomenon has been compared to George Lucas's epic *Star Wars* films of 1977-2005 and to the masterful fantasies by C.S. Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*; both of these have been turned into acclaimed movies in the past few years.



I have not read any of the Potter books and have seen only the first of the movies, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (2001), and the new one. I will analyze this latest entry in the screen edition of the Potter epic in light of some of the criticisms of the books.

But first, let me say *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* is, on its own terms, very well done. The pseudo Gothic production design creates a very credible visualization of J.K. Rowling's fairy tale world. The many special effects -- wands sparking off wondrous rays of power, portrait paintings that speak, a fantasy giant and other unique creations -- work as part of the story and do not, as in other contemporary films, call undue attention to themselves with their computer-made artifice. The director, David Yates, effectively manages the fantasy elements so that they are fully integrated with the tale's surface realism. The stylized acting of the adult characters (contrasted with the naturalism of the teenage characters) has the perfect manner and tone -- the sadistic instructor and headmistress from hell, Dolores Umbridge (Imelda Staunton), the kind, motherly witch, Minerva McGonagall (Maggie Smith), the ever-present helper Rubeus Hagrid (Robbie Coltrane), and the all-knowing, all good chief wizard, Dumbledore (Michael Gambon). Their rich performances add immeasurably to the film's believability, or what is often termed the audience's "suspension of disbelief."

Now to the dramatic substance. Devoted fans say that Harry is the hero for our time; it is wonderful that he has inspired so many millions in our visual age to pick up books and read and, even better, to read an epic about the moral journey of a good kid standing up and fighting against the evil of the world in the person of the dark Lord Voldemort (Ralph Fiennes), the slayer of his parents. Children read the moral teachings given Harry by Dumbledore, who advises his protégé that we all have good and bad inside of us and that the moral challenge we face is to make the right choice. On another occasion, Dumbledore instructs Harry to be content with what he has, not strive all his life for what he does not and cannot possess (the lesson learned by George Bailey through the agency of a Christian fantasy in Frank Capra's beloved *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946)). Harry always tries to do the right thing. Further, the Potter books and films stand apart in their lack of vivid bloodshed and violence; the stylized battles with wizard rods and fire are even less real than the non-graphic violence in old movies and TV shows.

Why then, has this evidently traditional, conservative story inspired a good deal of controversy? First, some Christians object to the books' emphasis on wizardry and magic. Harry is the wizard of destiny; magic and other supernatural phenomena are the essence of Rowling's fantasy world.

Scripture warns strongly against the occult, or supernatural, including magic, wizardry and witchcraft (e.g. Deuteronomy 18:9-14, Acts 19:18-19 and Revelation 21:8, among many, many citations). Thus, it is argued, the Potter books and films essentially substitute a supernatural, even Satanic, world of magic for our Judeo-Christian God. This is symbolized by the occult symbol tattooed on Harry's forehead. Rowling's Harry Potter, religious critics contend, is subversive of tradition, if not anti-Christian, and yet another chapter in the rising assault on our religion and our moral tradition.

Further, some argue the Potter epic lacks a moral anchor. The struggle between good and evil pits Harry and his schoolmates against Voldemort's dark forces, yet without reference to anything above and outside them as individuals. In a sense, it's all personal and subjective. Ann McCain, director of children's education at Trinity Presbyterian Church in Charlottesville, Virginia, wrote in 1999 in *World Magazine*: "Harry Potter is a perfect modern hero for alienated youth. He is an orphan who hates, and is hated by, his adoptive parents. . . . He makes his own way, directed by his feelings and his friendships, but not by any written moral code." Perhaps one could argue in defense that the chief wizard and moral teacher, Dumbledore, is the higher power, but, if true, this would be tantamount to making him the god of the story.

In this respect, Potter differs from Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*, whose hero returns to the real world wise with what has been learned in the fantasy world. Similarly, Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz* finds herself back in her bedroom in Kansas with a new appreciation of the preciousness of the people and the commonplace things she has in her life: "There's no place like home." (And of course Dorothy remains a human person throughout.) In Rowling's universe, the supernatural fantasy dominates and what there is of the real world is stylized and subsidiary to the fantasy. That real world is populated by the muggles, i.e. the common people without magic, like Harry's awful, persecuting aunt and uncle, the Dursleys. Actually, their world is no more real than Harry's; it is just common.

This brings me to another issue that may help explain some of the books' wild popularity among children. Although Harry often relies on the adult presence of Dumbledore, Rubeus Hagrid and Sirius Black (Gary Oldman), he and his schoolmates also are often portrayed not only as self-reliant but self-sufficient. Just as their struggle against Voldemort is entirely personalized, they are in effect their own society; there is little objective world outside of their own selves. And almost if not all of the villains seem to be adults. This brings to mind the self-absorption (which some might term "self-sufficiency") and that is so characteristic of many younger people today, with their resultant disregard for society's fundamental age-old rules – a trait that reflects the declining authority of religion, transcendent truth and objective morality above and outside the individual self. Perhaps Rowling is consciously tapping into the youth revolt, even though her books uphold moral standards, albeit on a subjective basis.

Many readers who know Rowling's work much better than I may be up in arms against these criticisms. I could be off base. Or perhaps I am taking a children's fantasy too seriously. But after the film ended, having regained my breath, which had been lost in *Order of the Phoenix*'s dizzy, unchanging, frenetic pace of adventurous incident heaped upon incident, I had a hollow feeling. I couldn't remember much beyond the fact Harry and his friends are in a death struggle. I could not recall being moved, much less seeing any visual images dramatizing the themes of the story (a typical failing of literalistic films since the 1960's). True, the film did end on a note of moral resolution, but what was it, other than Harry fighting on in the next film?

Let me end with another quotation, by the respected culture critic Carol Iannone, who wrote earlier in the Potter series of "the overcomplicated plots [that] turn on breathless suspense and sudden surprise, one trick out of the hat after another," producing "sense-saturation." "The kinetic shape of the action in the books is also reminiscent of movies today," she continued. "Something or someone always seems to be crashing, splashing, cracking, spraying, spitting, flying, or passing out."

Is all the occult razzle-dazzle and dizzying action a substitute for moral substance, despite the plot's good-evil dichotomy and Harry's heroic struggle? Is Harry really just another demonstration of our culture's ongoing moral and aesthetic decline? It seems to be an important question to examine.

Spencer Warren is ConservativeBattleline's movie critic

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Editor**

Sicko Loses Bet

by Sarah Berk

Michael Moore ends the movie "Sicko" with a lie. It may not be an intentional lie, but it is a falsehood, nonetheless. Michael Moore ends the movie saying that every European country offers "free" health coverage to their citizens and every European country provides such coverage through a "single payer" system.

Both statements are untrue. It is a sad commentary on the pathetically, uninformed state of the health care policy debate in America that health care journalists and American political leaders do not simply know that both of the statements are untrue and that they have not responded clearly and quickly to correct the error.



So what makes these statements untrue? Reality. Most European countries directly charge their citizens for their health coverage. It is not "free" anywhere. Some nations require people to buy coverage from health insurance companies that look very much like American health insurance companies. Other countries use a payroll tax on everyone's paycheck to pay for health coverage. In those countries, each citizen pays a portion of their weekly paycheck for health insurance - - just like our Social Security payroll deduction. In Germany, each employee pays 7 percent of each paycheck for health care and each employer matches that 7 percent. People also can spend additional money to buy better coverage.

The government of the Netherlands takes 9 percent of a worker's paycheck every week to purchase health coverage - - it's hard to figure out how Michael Moore can legitimately call such a payroll deduction "free."

Also, when the government of the Netherlands deducts that 9 percent, or when Germany deducts their 14 percent -- they do not use, as Mr. Moore incorrectly claims, a "single payer system" like Canada to provide the actual health insurance for each citizen. Each of those countries has multiple health plans - or "sickness funds" -- that people choose among. Citizens of Switzerland and the Netherlands choose between competing health plans to purchase their coverage.

So "Sicko" ends with a double lie: Coverage in Europe is not "free," nor is it provided through a pure, Canadian-like single payer system. "Sicko" either deliberately misleads us or is unintentionally wrong.

Each country in Europe has found its own unique path to universal coverage. Switzerland has no government health program at all. Everyone in Switzerland is required to purchase from one of nearly 100 competing insurance companies. (The Swiss government pays for coverage for the poor.)

What about France - - a country Michael Moore described as Eden in "Sicko?" The government uses a sales tax approach and uses that money to buy a basic (not comprehensive) package of coverage for about 80 percent of the French people. The basic government benefit coverage is somewhat incomplete, however, so 92 percent of the people in France now purchase additional private insurance to fill in the 20 - 40 percent gap in various parts of their government benefits. About 20 percent of the French people skip the government program completely and purchase only private coverage. In either case, the coverage isn't free and is not handled through a Canadian single-payer model.

It's unclear from the movie whether Mr. Moore knows that he is not telling the truth about Europe's health care systems, or whether he is still low on a learning curve relative to health care financing

and delivery. The learning curve seems pretty steep. He criticizes the U.S. government Medicare drug benefit in "Sicko," and he claims with some passion that the Canadians handle drug coverage much better. So how does the Canadian government actually handle drug coverage? Seven out of eight provinces do not cover non-hospital drug costs for anyone other than low income seniors. The federal government does not cover anyone.

People in those seven Canadian provinces might actually prefer the American Medicare system of partial coverage (favored by over 80 percent of enrollees), which Mr. Moore seems to sneer at in the movie. American Medicare drug coverage can have a "donut hole" in the middle. Seven of eight Canadian provinces skip the donut and give the citizens only the hole.

"Sicko" also tells the story of a Canadian on a golf vacation in Florida to illustrate the alleged superiority of the Canadian insurance and care delivery system because - - Mr. Moore claims in the movie - - the Canadian actually rushed home to Canada when he needed health care rather than getting that care in Florida. A valuable piece of information that "Sicko" conveniently does not mention at that point is that the Canadian government health coverage does not travel. Americans who are insured almost always have health coverage that covers at least emergencies whenever we travel. Canadians, however, have such long backlogs for care in so many places that the Canadian government benefit program can't afford to let people simply leave Canada to access care elsewhere. So the Canadian system that Mr. Moore so eagerly advocates decided not to let its health care benefits "travel" outside of Canada. Canadians in Florida, therefore, actually do return to Canada for care when they can... not because they don't think Americans deliver quality care, rather because their government does not cover care in America.

Again, it's not clear if Mr. Moore is low on the learning curve on that point, or more directly duplicitous. We will probably learn which statement is true as the debate progresses.

There are rumors Mr. Moore offers \$10,000 rewards for anyone who can prove that any point in his movies is untrue. Since he says that "every" country in Europe uses the Canadian model, and since there are quite a few countries in Europe, does he owe \$10,000 per country or just \$10,000 for getting Europe wrong as a package? Or is it \$10,000 per country on "single payer" and another \$10,000 per country for "free"?

We can let his conscience decide. Money is owed, however.

Sarah Berk is Executive Director of Health Care America

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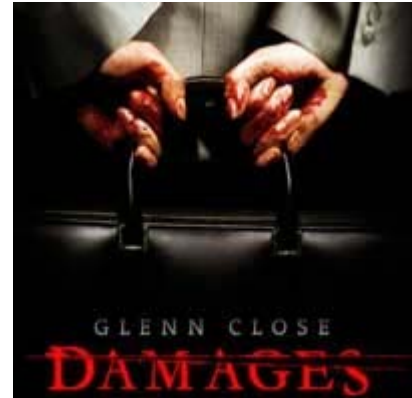
"Damages" Capitalism

by Thomas E. Brewton

The new TV series "Damages" is nonsensical.

The opening episodes have revolved around a clash of two titans: Glenn Close as Patty Hewes, a ruthless and hard-boiled plaintiff lawyer, and Ted Danson as Arthur Frobisher, an apparently equally ruthless and highly successful entrepreneur. The implausible plot brings them into a head-to-head clash.

The audience see brief scenes suggesting that Frobisher talked his employees into investing much of their life savings in his company's stock, shortly before he sold his own stock in the company to an outside buyer. Somehow or other, this bankrupted his employees.



Think about it for a moment, however. Clearly Frobisher had a very successful company, successful enough for an outside investor to buy Frobisher's presumably controlling interest in the company. How did change of stock ownership bankrupt the employees? In most takeover situations, the stock price is pushed up, at least initially.

What could Frobisher possibly have gained by advising his employees to invest in the company stock, whether he was planning to sell his stock, or not? In a company large and profitable enough to support Frobisher in the lifestyle we see, the investment of employees in the company stock would have been a drop in the bucket compared to the holdings of institutional investors. If all employees had bought stock, their purchases would likely have had no impact at all on the stock price, and it wouldn't have put a dime into Frobisher's pocket.

Charitably, we can say that the scriptwriters simply don't understand the real business world. They appear to have concocted a stew of unrelated ideas from Enron to the Martha Stewart case, and from the 1980s leveraged buyouts that led to dismemberment of companies to pay off acquisition debt. Then they sprinkled the broth with Karl Marx's view that capitalist profit is really stolen from the workers.

But today's audiences, schooled since the early 1960s to believe that all the world's ills result from capitalism, accept the script premise without a second glance. Our colleges and universities have inculcated the mindless assumption that, if an entrepreneur is successful, it can only be because he has oppressed the workers.

As Derek Bok, former president of Harvard, lamented:

Many seniors graduate without being able to write well enough to satisfy their employers. Many cannot reason clearly or perform competently in analyzing complex, non-technical problems, even though faculties rank critical thinking as the primary goal of a college education. Few undergraduates receiving a degree are able to speak or read a foreign language. Most have never taken a course in quantitative reasoning or acquired the knowledge needed to be a reasonably informed citizen in a democracy. And those are only some of the problems.

We can be sure, however, that all seniors will have been repeatedly exposed to liberal-Progressive-socialist ideology.

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Entrepreneurial Medicine

by John Goodman

In a recent Wall Street Journal editorial, Harvard Business School professor Regina Herzlinger asks, "Why are there no entrepreneurs in health care?" Alert readers of this column already know some of the answers.

In our fee-for-service payment system, doctors are slaves to the way they are paid. It doesn't matter whether the payor is public or private. It also doesn't matter whether we are in the United States or in Canada. Doctors have no freedom to repackage and reprice their services. More precisely, regardless of how they repackage, they cannot reprice. So almost any innovation that raises quality or lowers the patient's costs means less - not more - net income for the physician.



John Goodman

Fortunately, there are exceptions to this generalization. There are isolated markets here and there that are bustling and teeming with entrepreneurial activity. These islands of health care innovation are easy to spot. They are the places where the third-party payers are not.

Take TelaDoc, a company that has discovered something for medicine that lawyers, accountants, architects, engineers and other professionals discovered almost a century ago: the telephone.

TelaDoc is headed toward its one millionth customer. If that doesn't immediately knock your socks off, stop and consider: Almost one million people have stepped outside the traditional health insurance system and paid with their own money for a few simple services that our institutionalized, bureaucratic, archaic, third-party payment system cannot deliver. In addition to telephone consultations, TelaDoc patients have portable electronic medical records. Also, their prescriptions can be ordered electronically, taking advantage of software that reduces medical errors.

Another entrepreneurial venture -- walk-in clinics in pharmacies, supermarkets and shopping malls - - has recently discovered for medicine something nonmedical professionals have known about for several decades: the computer. Nurse practitioners not only enter patient data electronically, they follow computerized protocols in making decisions, and they can order prescriptions electronically as well. A MinuteClinic survey of 58,000 sore throat cases found that the nurses conformed to evidence-based treatment guidelines 99.15 percent of the time. By contrast, the RAND Corporation found that system wide, doctors deliver appropriate care only 55 percent of the time.

Here again, thousands of people are stepping outside the traditional payment system to pay with their own money for services they cannot get otherwise. Prices are posted and are about one-half what primary care physicians charge. There is usually very little waiting, and some clinics hand out beepers so patients can shop and browse while they wait. RediClinic CEO, Web Golinkin, writes in The Wall Street Journal that there are already 400 clinics and thousands more will open in the next few years unless the defenders of the status quo get state legislatures to stop them.

I know some will object that I am ignoring all the entrepreneurship over the past two decades loosely associated with the term "managed care." Granted, there has been a lot of that type of activity. But it's all on the wrong side of the market. Big market changes are not driven by entrepreneurial buyers. They are driven by entrepreneurial producers and sellers. More on that later.

John Goodman is president of the National Center for Policy Analysis, an independent public policy institute and are not affiliated with any other organization, trade association or corporation.

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Editor**

Mandate or Innovate?

by Greg Scandlen

Mandating that every American be forced to purchase health insurance is the latest fad among Republican politicians. From Massachusetts to California they are embracing the idea as an expression of "personal responsibility" that will help alleviate the "hidden tax" of free care provided to the uninsured.

What the idea really expresses is the woeful ignorance and hubris of some Republican politicians. What they are saying is, "I will tell you what to do, and you have a 'personal responsibility' to do it."

In fact, people who refuse to purchase health insurance are sending an important signal to the insurance industry that their products are not worth purchasing. They are not wrong. Most health insurance products on the market today are bloated with inefficiency and waste. For instance, in the non-group market it is not unusual for 33% of the premium dollar to be used up by administrative costs (a "loss-ratio" of 67%). Then, another third or so of the dollars paid out may be wasted in physicians' administrative costs devoted to complying with insurance company rules and regulations. That means a dollar spent on premium may deliver a mere 45 cents worth of health care services. It is simply not a good use of scarce resources -- especially for routine, low-cost services.

Further, consumers are saying that insurance company benefits are not what they are looking for and the customer services are second-rate. A recent survey by J. D. Powers and Associates found that only 12% of respondents trust their "health plan" (the current euphemism for "insurance company") to provide reliable information.

The regulators and politicians don't help, either. Over the years they have enacted around 2,000 "mandated benefits" that require people to buy coverage for in vitro fertilization and a host of other services they don't want and don't need. Other regulations, such as "community rating" laws require insurance companies to vastly over-charge low-paid young people who consume few services in order to subsidize middle-aged people with higher incomes who consume more services.

Instead of ignoring the signals consumers send and using the police powers of the State to force people to buy what they don't want, the insurance industry and the regulators should pay attention and develop innovative products that will deliver value to this market.

We have already seen that innovations such as Health Savings Accounts will appeal to market segments that did not find value before. Something like 40% of the people who have purchased HSAs in the non-group market were previously uninsured. But HSAs are only one of many possible innovations in health care financing. Mandatory coverage would short-circuit the vital process of innovation in a competitive market.

Further, mandatory coverage simply doesn't work. Politicians, for all their self-regard, do not have the power to wave a magic wand and force people to do what they want them to do. Virtually every state currently mandates auto insurance coverage and the number of uninsured motorists is very similar to the numbers of people without health insurance. In seventeen states the rate of non-insurance for auto (which is mandatory) is higher than for health insurance, which is not mandated.

Finally, people already have a "personal responsibility" to pay the bills they owe. Unfortunately, many health care providers so grossly overcharge people who pay their own bills that the customers give up on trying to pay. It is common for hospitals to charge an uninsured patient 400% more than an insured patient - for the exact same procedure. Yet the cost of performing the procedure is identical for both patients. The overcharging has become so bad that a growing number of uninsured Americans are going overseas for major surgery. Self-pay patients should be charged reasonable bills, and then the providers might discover there is no need to apply a "hidden tax" to people who are insured.

Republican politicians may pass many foolish laws, but they do not have the ability to repeal the laws of human behavior or of economics.

Greg Scandlen is the president of Consumers for Health Care Choices, a national membership organization based in Hagerstown, MD.

**E-mail the
Editor**

Top-Down Education

by Joanne Mandel

Having narrowly escaped the attempt to muscle through "immigration reform," voters ought to take note of another slow moving train headed our way courtesy of the combined efforts of big business and leftist progressives who seem to hold the trump cards in Congress. Many of the same deceptive tactics on display during the attempt to pass the immigration bill, before the public realized that their concerns were being ignored, were used quite successfully when Congress passed an "education reform" bill in 2002. Then, too, it was Senator Ted Kennedy and President George W. Bush who championed passage over objections raised by grassroots groups. Coming before the advent of the united efforts of bloggers and talk show hosts, the concerns of everyday Americans had no chance to prevail. In 2002, the details in the 700-plus pages of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) never entered the public debate.



Senator Lamar Alexander, who supports re-authorizing the No Child Left Behind Act, nonetheless has said it represents the high-water mark of federal involvement in local schools which runs against the historic grain of American education. By "federal involvement" he means top-down, centralized control, an arrangement more in keeping with the European political model where a governing elite, insulated from voter concerns by their political system, determines what is best for the country. Our system of government based upon the consent of the governed is intended to be quite different.

An excellent way to become an informed citizen, ready to participate in the battle over reauthorization of NCLB this September, is offered in the 150-page book, *America's Schools: Battleground for Freedom* (2005) by Allen Quist, Professor of Political Science at Bethany Lutheran College. It is our good fortune that Mr. Quist has both a scholarly and a practical interest in this massive federal intrusion into the management of every school in the country. And it is his shining accomplishment to have written a comprehensive analysis, the sort that is essential if the truth is to emerge.

In his book, Mr. Quist shows how NCLB meets the demands of special interest groups at the expense of everyday Americans. Corporate management, not thinking beyond the bottom line, lobbied hard for an education program that would supply them with pre-trained, entry-level workers. Leftist progressives have managed to establish a curriculum based on the National Standards for Civics and Government (an updated version of the National History Standards which the US Senate voted down 99 to 1 in 1995). After years of lessons - in science as well as social studies classes - filled with reminders of our national flaws and failures - many high school graduates no longer regard themselves as citizens of the United States but rather proudly regard themselves as "citizens of the world," in keeping with the leftist progressive attitude at the heart of the National Standards.

The author calls our attention to an apt description of the battle lines in American education: "Most Americans see the public school as an institution dedicated to the transmission of knowledge... [but others] view it as an agent of radical social change." Traditional academic education, committed to teaching the fundamental principles of freedom to our children, is being swept aside. "*American Schools: The Battleground for Freedom*" offers well-documented support for the argument that the latter are using K-12 instruction to promote radical social change.

The author explains that the new curriculum is meant to accomplish some very curious things: it undermines both national sovereignty, ignoring the need for national borders, and love of God and country which are treated as outdated and divisive barriers to world peace. The themes throughout K-12 promote multiculturalism and a postmodern perspective that disqualifies rational argument and the distinction between good and evil. Mr. Quist's concise accounts of these concepts expose the destructive potential of the new curriculum. Children who subscribe to it cannot be expected to serve their country in time of need.

Proponents of nationalizing education under the guise of "education reform" are clever and those who haven't learned to read between the lines are sure to be out-foxed. A notable instance of the success of their tactics came in 1994 when President Bill Clinton signed three education bills. Critics of Goals 2000: Educate America Act, the most controversial of the three, were won over by assurances that participation by the states would be voluntary. After it passed they found out that any state that decided not to participate would be denied education funding. It was the proverbial 'offer you couldn't refuse' and all 50 States eventually complied.

Goals 2000 effectively took education policy in a new direction. NCLB incorporates that departure from traditional arrangements and includes controls to prevent any backsliding by the states. The goals established in 1994 require that the high school graduation rate increase to at least 90 percent, that United States students be first in the world in mathematics and science achievement, and that every school promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children. These goals are cause for concern for several reasons. First of all, the goals read like a utopian wish list and require a level of success obtainable only in the world to come. Yet, they are not simply aspirations, they are legal obligations.

What sort of mischief might a school undertake without the knowledge or consent of parents under this partnership arrangement? The fact that Washington executed an end run around the 10th amendment to the US Constitution, the one that restricts federal involvement in all powers that are reserved to the states and the people, when it hijacked education policy should raise a red flag. Goals 2000 and NCLB with their federal mandates for curriculum standards, annual testing and massive data collection on every child are features of a heavy-handed, top down centralized regime, one most out of step with the American system of government. In fact it is at cross-purposes with the latitude needed to be a self-governing people. This breach of custom was candidly acknowledged in a progress report submitted by the federal government to the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2000.*

"Most countries have national curricula and even national examinations...In the United States, however, education is managed at the state and local levels...Thus, the very concept of designing and agreeing on a [national] set of learning outcomes across traditional jurisdictional lines is new, and in the minds of many, unsettling and undesirable. [p. 12 of the progress report]"

In June of 2007 President George W. Bush challenged critics of NCLB by insisting that the law does indeed promote local control of schools. He seems to have reduced the meaning of "local control" to local responsibility for fixing what Washington says is wrong. Despite the president's claims, there has been a fundamental transfer of control from the local and state level to a centralized bureaucracy in the nation's capitol. That shift was facilitated by the absence of information that might have alerted the public to the growing strength of a multicultural worldview in American educational and political circles.

Classrooms have truly become the battleground for individual freedom. All too often what is taught in K-12 is subtly indoctrinating children with values, attitudes and beliefs that conform to a multicultural and internationalist agenda, the one that almost prevailed in the battle over the immigration bill. We are now being made to submit to policies orchestrated in Washington and even Paris. Because it is ignored in public discourse, we have not recognized how much our status as self-governing people has been eroded. We may still vote for local school board members but those really calling the shots are a long way from home.

**A copy of the annual Report of the National Goals Panel is available at state departments of education or state libraries.*

Irradiation or E. Coli?

by Dennis Avery

Mr. Will Daniels oversees food safety at Earthbound Farm in Salinas, CA—the company that last year grew and packaged the bagged spinach that killed three people, including a 2-year-old boy, due to contamination with E. coli O157 bacteria. The spinach also sickened at least 200 other people, many with serious kidney failure.

"We thought we were the best, but clearly that wasn't enough," says Daniels.

After the tragedy, Earthbound Farms hired a food safety microbiologist, who immediately told his new bosses that they were kidding themselves if they thought it wouldn't happen again.



Dennis T. Avery

"Another bullet is coming your way," he warned. "Will the processing eliminate the [bacterial] hazard? The answer for this industry is no. You can reduce; you cannot eliminate."

Earthbound has nevertheless put in place the most aggressive testing and safety program in the industry. All its greens are now tested for pathogens twice—on arrival from the field and again when the packaged products come off the processing lines. The testing has confirmed the fears: some of the produce is still contaminated.

"We're not going to rest until we explore every possible safety improvement," says Daniels.

The problem is that neither farmers nor the federal government are doing all they could to stop the deadly E. coli from poisoning customers. Electronic irradiation could destroy 99.999 percent of the dangerous bacteria, effectively eliminating the E. coli danger. Irradiation simultaneously kills the spoilage bacteria, keeping the produce fresher longer.

Irradiation is now being used widely to protect hamburger from the E. coli dangers, with a major irradiation plant in Sioux City, Iowa. Irradiation is even more important for lettuce and spinach, because we most often eat them raw. But the Food and Drug Administration has been sitting on a petition to permit irradiation of leafy greens for eight years. They're afraid if they give approval, the food-scare activists will howl with rage. Never mind the kid who died and a hundred people with kidney failure. We want our food to be politically correct even more than we want it safe.

Nor are organic farmers protecting their customers. The Earthbound field on which the contaminated spinach was grown was managed organically, in transition to organic certification, under lease to a company co-owned by Earthbound. Composted manure may have been used to provide the Earthbound crops with nitrogen. Composting can kill bacteria, but its safety can't be guaranteed.

On the other hand, E. coli bacteria with the same signature were found in a nearby free range cattle herd, and wild pigs were moving through the area. We can't defend open fields from bacteria that are everywhere—but, with irradiation, we could kill the bacteria that actually get into our food.

The mega-bucks food scare industry, of course, is against irradiation. They demand "more natural" food production and less processing. Crumbling under pressure, the major grocery store Safeway has just announced it will no longer market meat packaged with carbon monoxide gas even though it keeps meat fresher, longer, in the consumer's refrigerator, thereby providing an extra safety margin. In other words, the food industry is being forced by food-fear rhetoric to abandon technologies that benefit consumers.

How many people will have to die? When will we realize-again-that Mother Nature is a harsh mistress, unleashing deadly viruses and proliferating bacteria along with her sunlight and rain. Survival of the fittest is her motto.

Humans used to consider that our ability to think was part of our survival equipment. Now it seems we rely on dumb luck. Poor little child. Poor grieving parents. Poor FDA?

Dennis Avery is a senior fellow for Hudson Institute in Washington, DC and the Director for Center for Global Food Issues (www.cgfi.org). He was formerly a senior analyst for the Department of State. Readers may write him at Post Office Box 202, Churchville, VA 24421.

**E-mail the
Editor**

Clouds and Warming

by Alan Caruba

There's a reason why one should be extremely wary of the computer models that are cited by the endless doomsday predictions of Al Gore, the UN's International Panel on Climate Change, and all the other advocates of "global warming."

The reason is clouds. Computer models simply cannot provide for the constant variability of clouds, so they ignore them.

In a July issue of *The Economist* there was an article, "Grey-Sky thinking" subtitled, "Without understanding clouds, understanding the climate is hard. And clouds are the least understood part of the atmosphere." Since the increasingly rabid claims of Earth's destruction from rising temperatures depend on computer modeling, how can they be regarded as accurate if they must largely exempt or deliberately manipulate the impact of clouds?

How can you make predictions, whether it's a week or a decade from now, if you haven't a clue why clouds do what they do?

Tim Garrett, a research meteorologist at the University of Utah, with refreshing candor has said, "We really do not know what's going on. There are so many basic unanswered questions on how they (clouds) work." And that is never mentioned in the great "global warming" debate, one we are continuously told is "decided" and upon which there is a vast scientific "consensus."

This is particularly significant because clouds act to both cool and warm the Earth. It is widely believed that high clouds can reflect solar radiation away from the planet, but they can also serve to trap heat in the atmosphere. New studies, however, have given some cause to reconsider this. Moreover, cloud droplets can last for less than a second while whole clouds can live out their lives in minutes or days. There is no way to integrate such massive, constant change into a computer model that divides the world into boxes up to sixty miles on a side, so they mostly do not.

This is why there are two new missions by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration involving highly sophisticated devices to measure and study the actions of clouds. This is also why, up to now, the computer models on which "global warming" claims have been made have actually been tweaked, adjusted, manipulated—take your choice of terms—to factor in the mystery of clouds.

How wide is the computer modeling gap when it comes to predicting the weather? *The Economist* reported that, "In a recent paper in *Climate Dynamics*, Mark Webb of Britain's Hadley Centre for Climate Change and his colleagues reported that clouds account for 66% of the differences between members of one important group of models and for 85% of them in another group." Clouds simply defy the logarithms of computer modelers.

In short, "Too much still remains unknown about the physical mechanisms that determine cloud behavior," said *The Economist*.

Here's a useful scientific definition of the weather: "atmospheric conditions at a given time and a particular location." Drive a few miles in any direction and the weather is likely to be different. Stay put and it will change soon enough. My other favorite definition is "chaos."

In an August 2002 article, "The Trouble with the Weather", the European Space Agency noted that, "Forecasting the weather remains notoriously difficult because the atmosphere is not easy to predict, being affected by such factors as air pressure and temperature, air movements, the distribution of water in its various states (clouds) in the atmosphere, and static electricity stored in the air."



Alan Caruba

"Clouds are that 800-pound gorilla," says research meteorologist, Gerald Mace, also of the University of Utah, referring to the critical role they play in the weather on any portion of planet Earth.

That gorilla, however, is never mentioned by the "global warming" propagandists. Neither clouds, nor volcanoes, nor the most important factor, the Sun, is credited as responsible for either the climate or the weather. Instead, we are constantly told that "human activity" is the single cause.

Unmentioned, too, is the fact that water vapor constitutes 95% of all greenhouse gases. Environmentalists insist that carbon dioxide plays a major role. It is well to keep in mind, however, that CO₂ is the gas that is vital to the growth of all vegetation on Earth. Nor do global warming advocates remind people that the Earth is at the end of the interglacial period between Ice Ages which suggests another one is due any day now.

Indeed, the only global warming that is occurring has been happening since the end of the last mini-Ice Age in the 1800s. It is a natural response and is not a dramatic rise of four to ten degrees. It doesn't even represent one-half a degree increase.

Following the publication of the results of new study in the journal of the American Geophysical Union revealing that the absence of clouds actually had a *cooling* affect—the opposite of widely held opinion on the role of clouds—Dr. Roy Spencer of the Earth System Science Center noted that, "To give an idea of how strong this enhanced cooling mechanism is, if it was operating on global warming, it would reduce estimates of future warming by over 75 percent. The big question that no one can answer right now is whether this enhanced cooling mechanism applies to global warming."

If leading meteorologists remain largely ignorant of why clouds do what they do, why would we pay any attention to those with a financial or ideological incentive to propagate "global warming" claims? There is, however, a difference between being ignorant and being stupid. Believing the "global warming" lies is stupid.

Alan Caruba writes a weekly column, "Warning Signs", posted on the Internet site of The National Anxiety Center, www.anxietycenter.com. His book, "Right Answers: Separating Fact from Fantasy", is published by Merril Press.

**E-mail the
Editor**

Free Public Education?

by Renny Hartmann

Instead of collecting millions in real estate taxes from local property owners to support thousands of public school districts, citizens should be able to retain their "contribution" to public education and elect to send their children to schools of their own choosing by paying direct tuition.

This proposal is not as radical as it sounds. Most mandatory public school laws are only about a century old. New Jersey's law dates from 1874 and requires all young persons from six to sixteen to attend. California (a much younger state) passed its mandatory attendance in 1913. Therefore, the imperative for states to provide free public education is not ancient and immutable. The US Constitution itself says nothing about education. (Federal legislation regarding schools and colleges comes either through the executive for defense or interstate commerce clause.)



Prior to mandatory attendance, children still attended schools, but they were provided privately in homes or through religious organizations or community involvement. Costs were borne directly by those involved.

The original compulsory system was devised when America was 90 percent rural and most school calendars are still geared toward a farm economy where young family members were needed during the summer growing season. As the nation has about reversed that statistic, those calendars are mostly archaic.

Early public one-room schools in Dover Township (now Toms River Township), New Jersey, claimed to educate first through ninth graders with enough skills for them to run a household and/or a small business. Their typical curriculum assigned forty vocabulary words a night and forty math problems a night. High school, begun in 1891, followed a very common college preparatory curriculum of grammar and composition, science, math, foreign language, and history. The arts were after-school programs.

My former high school students would've croaked at forty anything per night and actually now current graduates take about two years of community college education to reach what my 1950s high school provided for me.

Curricula are constantly dumbed down to accommodate larger and larger populations of more and more diverse and often disinterested student populations.

Costs seem uncontainable for whatever is offered. Many school systems today run budgets that could've supported some cities a few years ago.

I would take that money and leave it in the hands of the consumers of education. Cities like Washington, DC, cost about \$16,000 per student and according to the NAEP, graduate its high school student with mostly a fourth grade reading level. The average educational cost today nationally is nearly \$9,000 per student.

Leaving the tax monies in the hands of the purchasers of education would eliminate some of the inequities of real estate taxes, end the gerry-rigged revenue sharing of state and federal funding. Considering that the Tenth Amendment leaves anything not enumerated in the Constitution to the states, federal funding and federal mandates could be discontinued. The federal government in 2006 spent nearly \$54.4 billion on education and yet it only supplies about 10 cents on the dollar to any

local school budget. States supply about twice that. Those costly exchanges of collecting and rearranging taxes would disappear.

- 1) The very process of not assessing and collecting and dispersing taxes would save millions by itself. The total US costs of education (not counting unwanted pregnancies, illegal drugs, school crime, all the social ancillaries) is c. \$500 billion, half a trillion nation-wide.
 - 2) Parents and students who made their own choice of a school would be more invested in supporting its programs and activities
 - 3) If choices were within township or city limits, current facilities should be ample enough for any current shifting of student populations
 - 4) Calculations would have to be made to account for renters and what their landlords have paid in real estate taxes that go toward school budgets. My liberal friends always wail about my idea here that "the poor" would be left out. I suspect ways of educating the poor would actually improve.
 - 5) Boards of education could be changed to boards of trustees that like businesses oversee general implementation of good economic practices, legal observance, and, in this case, educational standards
 - 6) Minorities could immediately escape the plantations that particularly urban schools have provided, for those that did not function to education-buyers' community standards would simply cease to exist; no mayor's budget or governor's grant would continue to prop them up when they fail the purview of boards of trustees above
 - 7) The sometimes truly pernicious effect of the teachers unions would be erased by those associations' initial loss of power. My association, the National Education Association, and all my local permutations, of which I am still a member, has backed every untested, radical, often useless social idea to come down the pike for forty years. In 1972, the president of the NEA proclaimed it the method of future social change and what a change it has been: the highest SATs were 1972, unwed teen pregnancies were first recorded by the CDC in 1972, and the sex, drug, crime, and denigration of teaching actual academic skills has been on the skids right into the present. "School reform" itself dates to 1983.
- I do not oppose unions and would certainly believe that teachers and other educational staff might form new organizations, but they would no longer hold classrooms hostage, dominate elected public officials, nor offer powerful voter pressure to support political agendas
- 8) Political mandates to teach no smoking, pro-condom use, no trans fats, pro-touchy feely socialism, no drugs, pro-pacifism, and every other leftist idea would only be included in curricula if tuition payers wanted to buy them
 - 9) All the nitwit legal spider's web of what teachers can and cannot say, can and cannot teach (consider the importance of religion in history and literature), all the "politically incorrect" thoughts and actions that are now censored (true censorship because it comes from a government institution) would no longer be forbidden
 - 10) Private schools are run not much differently than my list above

Of course, schools will still have bureaucracies (there's always hierarchy), parent disputes might sometimes erupt around a school like maniac parent spectators at Little League games, but there would still be more direct and personal responsibility considering the costs involved. Not that many people would really try to torpedo an institution they have actually paid to create and receive rewards from.

What Matters For GOP?

by Scott Rasmussen

Reporters have been breathlessly and endlessly covering every event and comment in the 2008 race for the White House. In what may be the longest election coverage in history, a look at the Republican nomination process raises questions as to whether the reporters are paying attention to the things that really matter.



The most recent example of this is the straw poll held in Ames, Iowa a couple of weeks ago. Despite the fact that leading prospects such as Rudy Giuliani, Fred Thompson, and [John McCain](#) did not participate, the press coverage hailed the event as being terribly significant. The big winner, of course, was Mitt Romney. Second place went to Mike Huckabee who hoped the strong showing would vault him into the top tier of candidates.

Both Romney and Huckabee received a minor bounce in the polls for a few days. But, two weeks later, the national polls show that the Iowa event had virtually no impact. Romney remains mired in third place barely ahead of John McCain. Huckabee's support continues to be measured in the mid-single digits.

It's not really that the press got the coverage wrong. Romney did what he had to do in Iowa and did it well. Huckabee did exceed expectations, apparently on the strength of a well-received speech. What the reporters got wrong was a sense of context and scale. Despite the enormous coverage, [less than half the nation's voters even knew that Romney was the winner](#). It is fair to assume that a much smaller number attached any particular significance to it.

The same lack of context has been seen in coverage of the many campaign "debates" this season. Reporters comment on the words, the style, the comebacks and everything else about the debates except the lack of public interest. Ratings have been down and [most voters say the events are 'boring.'](#)

Earlier in the year, the nation's political commentators dubbed McCain the frontrunner despite the fact the Giuliani consistently led in the polls. Today, of course, Giuliani remains on top in the polls and McCain's campaign is struggling to stay afloat. Some reporters have suggested that Giuliani only leads because voters don't understand his position on the issues. But, Rasmussen Reports polling shows that [two-thirds of Republicans already view the former New York City Mayor as politically moderate or liberal](#). Perhaps, the conventional wisdom held by reporters is more out-of-synch with Republican Primary Voters than [Rudy Giuliani](#).

More recently, the same reporters have picked up on a story line that Fred Thompson's delay in entering the race has been a mistake. However, the polls show Thompson remains more of a threat to Giuliani's lead than Romney. His support is down a bit from its peak, but he's still showing a lot of potential. As Rasmussen Reports has noted many times in recent months, that may change when Thompson does enter the race for real. But, it may not.

The bottom line is that no one can say with confidence what will happen when 2008 arrives and Republican Primary voters get to have their say. That's because the current phase of the campaign season is like Spring Training baseball. The insiders love it and nobody else is paying attention. The insiders thrive because they've missed the endless analysis of minor gaffes and guessing which stories will have legs.

For those who love the game, it's easy to overemphasize the spring training events like Iowa straw polls and "debates" with no one watching. In reality, though, spring training is a chance for the players to get ready for the season and for the insiders to get a first look at how the talent is shaping up for the coming season. Those who really understand the game know that spring training victories don't count once the regular season begins.

Scott Rasmussen, president of Rasmussen Reports, has been an independent pollster for more than a decade. Rasmussen Reports' [Election 2006](#) coverage has been praised for its accuracy and reliability. Michael Barone, Senior Writer for U.S. News & World Report and co-author of The Almanac of American Politics, mentions, "One clear lesson from the Republican victory of 2004 and the Democratic victory of 2006 is that the best place to look for polls that are spot on is RasmussenReports.com."

**E-mail the
Editor**

Woman Combat Politics

by Elaine Donnelly

According to Washington D.C. tradition, August is the best month for releasing bad news and sweeping it under the rug because members of Congress are out of town. So it was on August 9, when the RAND Corporation finally released their long-overdue report on women serving in or near direct ground combat.

Congress passed legislation ordering the Department of Defense to produce a report on the many issues affecting women in or near land combat by March 31, 2006. But Dr. David Chu, Assistant Defense Secretary for Personnel & Readiness, passed off the project to RAND Corporation, which missed the deadline by more than a year and a half.

The substandard document that RAND finally released on August 9 dismisses the consequences of allowing Army officials to make up their own rules. It denies the existence of current Defense Department regulations, and rests its case on an obsolete (1992) Army rule -- but only part of that rule -- for purposes of expediency.

Authors of the RAND resorted to setting up "straw man" arguments that would be laughable if they were not so serious. For example, the report makes much of a non-existent word, "colocate," which supposedly has a meaning different from the word "collocate," a genuine word that still exists in the Defense Department "collocation rule." This is the silliest "debate" since "potato" vs. "potahto," and someone needs to call it off.

RAND's Rubber Stamp Report is a disservice to both men and women in the military, and to members of Congress whose concerns about oversight have been disregarded once again. The Center for Military Readiness will be analyzing this issue in more depth, and encouraging members of Congress to schedule hearings soon.

Elaine Donnelly is President of the Center for Military Readiness.



**E-mail the
Editor**

Inconvenient House Truths



House #1

A 20 room mansion (not including 8 bathrooms) heated by natural gas. Add on a pool (and a pool house) and a separate guest house, all heated by gas. In one month this residence consumes more energy than the average American household does in a year. The average bill for electricity and natural gas runs over \$2,400. In natural gas alone, this property consumes more than 20 times the national average for an American home. This house is not situated in a Northern or Midwestern "snow belt" area. It's in the South.



House #2

Designed by an architecture professor at a leading national university. This house incorporates every "green" feature current home construction can provide. The house is 4,000 square feet (4 bedrooms) and is nestled on a high prairie in the American Southwest. A central closet in the house holds geothermal heat-pumps drawing ground water through pipes sunk 300 feet into the ground. The water (usually 67 degrees F.) heats the house in the winter and cools it in the summer. The system uses no fossil fuels such as oil or natural gas and it consumes one-quarter electricity required for a conventional heating/cooling system. Rainwater from the roof is collected and funneled into a 25,000 gallon underground cistern. Wastewater from showers, sinks and toilets goes into underground purifying tanks and then into the cistern. The collected water then irrigates the land surrounding the house. Surrounding flowers and shrubs native to the area enable the property to blend into the surrounding rural landscape.

HOUSE #1 is outside of Nashville, Tennessee; it is the abode of the "environmentalist," Al Gore.

HOUSE #2 is on a ranch near Crawford, Texas; it is the residence the of the President of the United States, George W. Bush.

An "inconvenient truth."

**E-mail the
Editor**

About China

by Darcy A. Kern

A friend of mine recently returned from a fifteen-day trip to China during which she traveled throughout the eastern half of the country. The trip was a vacation, but because she traveled with a friend who was originally from China, she was able to see places that few American tourists have the opportunity to see. She also had an opportunity to interact with and listen to a diverse group of Chinese men and women. Consequently, it was not just a fun vacation but a highly informative trip. After the visit she had a greater appreciation for the Chinese people, their culture and their history than she had had previously. She also gained a better insight into the problems China must confront in the future.



Modern Chinese attitudes, my friend noted, are extremely complex. The people she met were overwhelmingly kind and giving. Many of them voiced genuine admiration and fondness for Americans as well. One man told her of an American family with nine children whom he met while they traveled in China. Five of the children had been adopted from China and had severe disabilities. It was hard for him to imagine caring for so many children, but he was greatly impacted by the love and compassion that motivated the parents to have such a large and diverse family.

In Chongqing my friend visited two small museums. The first was dedicated to General Joseph W. Stilwell, the commander of the China-Burma-India Theater during World War II. The second commemorated the 1st American Volunteer Group, a group of pilots more commonly known as the "Flying Tigers." Both Stilwell and the Flying Tigers helped the Chinese defeat the Japanese in Burma and China during the war. The men and women who founded and operate these two museums, particularly the latter, did so in appreciation of the Americans who fought and died alongside the Chinese to ensure their freedom from a vicious enemy. They also sought to emphasize the close ties of friendship that once existed between the United States and China.

Yet in spite of such gratitude for the assistance they received during World War II, many Chinese seem to have an acute sense of inferiority about their history. They compensate for this with an inflated sense of their current cultural and technological status. Because China has been controlled for much of its history by foreigners (the Mongols, the Manchurians, the British, the French, the Japanese and Americans), my friend sensed that the Chinese have a self-obligation to prove their country is now the equal of, if not better than, the modern industrial world powers. Consequently, they claim that everything in China is the biggest, the best or the fastest in the world and that they invented most of the technological advances of the modern world. While it is certainly true that the Chinese introduced Europeans to gunpowder, paper and the compass and that they currently have a rapidly growing economy, many of the historic and modern claims my friend heard were wildly inaccurate. One wonders if this is due in part to the absence of a proper historical context in the teaching of history, to the government's censorship of current information, and to a resurgence of nationalism as the Chinese indulge a universal human desire to be proud of one's heritage.

But for all of China's recent economic growth, the country will face some very serious problems in the future. The most notable problem is one of demography. Because China adheres to a strict one-child policy, with the exception of ethnic minorities and some rural families who are allowed two children, there were few babies or children to be seen. Many of the young adults in their late 20s with whom my friend spoke said it is common for young people not to want any children at all. They freely admitted that having been raised as the "little emperors" in their own families as the first generation born after implementation of the one-child policy (and being severely spoiled as a result), neither they nor their friends have a desire for even the one child permitted by the government. By mid-century this may have an enormous impact on China's economic, cultural and foreign policy as the population ages significantly.

Another problem is a general discontent with the Communist Party. Without mentioning the subject or soliciting information, my friend was bombarded with complaints from taxi drivers, tour guides and others about the wealth of Communist Party officials. Communism, they complained, was supposed to ensure that everyone lived equally and that there was no disparity in wealth. Yet in China such equality of means is non-existent and they were disillusioned with both the ideology and the pretense of equality maintained by the government. Many of the young adults also noted that among their generation there is a declining interest in joining the Party.

All of this is not to say that there will be immediate economic and political troubles in the country. But it did appear that a resurgent nationalism coupled with apathy toward posterity and a frustration with the political status quo could create a volatile combination of problems in the next fifty years. The potential consequences, including regional aggression, economic decline or a change of government, could have a tremendous impact upon China, its neighbors and the world. This is particularly true for Japan and Russia, whose birthrates are also declining sharply, and for India, whose population is booming.

My friend, who has since learned much about China's history and culture, laments the fact that so few Americans are well-informed about China and fewer still have visited the country. It is worth a trip-the people are nice, the food is good, and the cultural heritage is very rich. If you go, be sure to see the Stilwell and Flying Tigers museums in Chongqing.

Darcy A. Kern is a Policy Analyst for the Free Congress Foundation.

**E-mail the
Editor**

Black Gold

by C. Scott Parker

"Why Gas Costs More" by Alan Caruba reminds me of a book I have been writing in my head for some 15 years. I already have the title selected "Black Gold or Fools' Gold."

I graduated from The University of Texas-Austin in 1958, with a BS in Petroleum Engineering. I went to work initially for The Texas Company (Texaco, etc.) before starting my own businesses from 1962 to the present. Caruba has struck on chord with a theme that I have been preaching about in Washington, DC, Austin, TX, and most other areas of the USA. I was never a paid lobbyist. My personal involvement was derived from regulation controls initiated by President Nixon and then attending the hearings conducted by FERC and the DOE concerning the 1977 Gas Act that was originally touted as a deregulation act, but proved to be just the opposite.



That was the same time government regulations were attempting to prioritize heating oils and natural gas to hospitals and other front line institutions and how the increased costs were to be borne by producers and pipeline companies and not the end users. I also heard a U.S. Senator state on the record that the only reason a Major Oil Company drilled a dry hole was for tax purposes. I visited with Congressman Ammerman from the Pennsylvania District that included Titusville, the home of Col. Drake #1, the first true oil well that was drilled in 1859 by Seneca Oil Co. on Aug. 27th. 1859. The Congressman knew absolutely nothing about fossil fuels.

I admit to being in the generation that screwed up the energy business. We were good about talking to each other, but spent no time talking to Joe Filling Station hand or John Q. Grocer, trying to explain our business. Our special talent was creating new terms for old tax concepts along with an entire dictionary of new names for equipment, i.e. Christmas Tree, Depletion, Intangible Development Costs, et al. Remember also that "Dallas" and J.R. Ewing came along and was the favorite of the entire World. However that gave the "Universal Image" of Energy Companies and their Management the wrong image.

At 72, I am still working full time for myself, but as a Professional Engineer mostly in Structural Engineering. The Energy Sector has a bleak future in the USA, and I see no turn around as long as the Hate Groups are controlling the information highways.

Sincerely,

C. Scott Parker, San Antonio, TX

**E-mail the
Editor**

Reader Comments

CONSERVATIVE BATTLELINE ONLINE

Editor: It would have been a good idea in "How Big Government Will Fall," for younger readers, to have a paragraph on what the Progressive movement was all about, and how it morphed into the nanny state. It's one of those "loaded" words that sounds nice today when not understood in its historical context. Jameson Campaigne *[Editor responds: Good point. The American progressive movement began when graduate student Woodrow Wilson went to Europe and decided Bismarck's authoritarian Germany was more efficient than the U.S, that the reason was our constitutional separation of powers and that the solution was centralization of power in the president and the national government. His legacy is still with us today and the conservative solution is to reverse the course back to federalism and the Constitution. As Ronald Reagan put it, "The balance of power intended in the Constitution is the guarantor of the greatest measure of individual freedom any people have ever known. Our task this year, this decade, must be to reaffirm these ideas."]*

Editor: After reading "How Big Government Will Fall," I continue to be amazed at the calm acceptance of the idea of a President Hillary Clinton. The supposed "conservative" media talk of her as if she's the sharpest thing since the bread knife. This chameleon is nothing more than a dangerous Marxist! When are conservatives going to speak the truth about her and her disgraceful behavior in the White House? We're sick of the favorable coverage she's getting. To hell with her economic policies! Another Clinton presidency will spell doom for this nation, and the final nail in the coffin of the American "experiment". We expect the left to give her a pass, but our side should know better. You want to see first hand the misery of what a Marxist state looks like? Come on up to "Marx-achusetts". We don't even have control over our vote anymore. Wake up! Linda Rapoza, Fall River, Massachusetts

Editor: Why the glorification in "How Big Government Will Fall" of EJ Dionne as a thinker as some folks do with that lamentable fellow Tom Friedman? If EJ Dionne is a thinker, then David Brooks is the modern day successor to the Academy. And David is a pleasure to read, with tight copy too. Tim Sullivan

Editor: Reading "How Big Government Will Fall" reemphasizes that I have been very concerned with the direction this country is taking from both the Democrats AND the Republicans. I cannot see how we can survive as the world's preeminent power considering the direction we are headed. We have so many powers pulling us in so many directions that we are fast losing what brought us to this point in history--to have it fail because we lost our direction. Sorry to be so negative, however it IS of concern to me. Thanks for letting me express my opinion. Gene A. Pierce

Editor: I think Paul Weyrich is correct in his "Election Predictions" that Hillary will be the nominee. But, I believe that she carries so much baggage and has such a large negative public perception that many people will turn out to vote against her and thus she will not win the Presidency. I also believe

the fact that she is a woman will have a lot to do with it (right or wrong) but many people will vote against her because she is a woman. I think the Senate will only move 1 or 2 seats in one party direction. I am not sure about that. I do believe that Mr. Weyrich is correct regarding the House. I do think that it might be a stretch to get back the 16 seats this cycle. Robert H.

Editor: I really don't see a record of being correct in Paul Weyrich's "Election Predictions." It seems to me he has made more than one mistake!, Is he serious, Hillary?!! She will be soundly defeated by President Thompson and VP Gingrich. As he said in his closing remarks, he should be prepared to change his phone number. Kurt Klingensmith

Editor: As per Paul Weyrich's "Election Predictions," after much thought, I stick with my signature station description: "First pundit in the nation to call for and support a Fred Thompson candidacy and a Thompson-Lieberman administration." Steven M. Saul, The Steven Saul Show, "The Voice of The Silent Majority," Reno, Nevada

Editor: Paul Weyrich is foolish to predict Hillary will be elected president. Hillary always has been the way she is except that she's been on her good behavior for the past 7 years. But once elected, we'll see her again just as she always was before she started running for the Senate. I can't believe the American people would be that stupid. We had the decline and fall of Rome, of Persia, of the Ottomans of the British Empire, and now the U.S. is on the edge of decline, both culturally and fiscally because our legislators are more interested in their own political careers than they are in what is good for the nation. If Hillary is elected, she will put us in full decline. New York was regarded as an ungovernable city before Giuliani. He was tough enough to make New York a livable city. When he went in as mayor, there was a \$2 billion deficit. When he went out there was a \$2 billion surplus. The U.S. needs that kind of leadership. Earl Asbury, Colorado Springs

Editor: I hope he is wrong but I am afraid Paul Weyrich in his "Election Predictions" might be right. God spare us Senator Hillary Clinton (and her husband) back in the White House. Doesn't anybody care about her criminality? Judy Novotny

Editor: In his "Election Predictions" Paul Weyrich has been out in the sun too long! Hilary has too much baggage and when the linen gets out she is cooked. Mitt Romney will cut her up in little pieces. The GOP and presidential hopefuls have to concentrate on the Silent Majority's concern which is Immigration. Keep on that subject and forget Iraq. Hammered day after day, the Democrats lose the House, Senate and Hilary. Bill Cridland, Bolton MA

Editor: Right on for Alan Caruba's "Why Gas Costs More." Keep that story up front. Fred Campbell

**E-mail the
Editor**