Time to End the Drug War?

Seattle’s drug arrests are “off the charts” in unfairly targeting African Americans, says a UW sociologist...see page 5.

Germany strikes back against climate change...see page 5.

Cracking down on bias crimes

A city human rights task force wants to up the penalty for targeting people because of their economic status...see page 4.

Petroleum’s paradox: Wealth and misery both thrive in Africa’s oil fields...p. 8
America’s wars are leading us into moral and financial bankruptcy. Praying for peace is not enough; Christians have to find a different way

Lest We Forget

By RICH LANG, Contributing Writer

There are many, far too many times, when our nation collectively forgets that the invasion of Iraq was both immoral and illegal, fabricated around lies, deceptions, and distortions, and supported by an undercurrent of militaristic Christianity.

We forget that this administration cooked the intelligence books and willfully deceived the American people. We forget that this administration opened the door to both the torture of prisoners and the shrinking of civil rights of citizens. We forget that this administration would like to impose on the world and, yes, on our own nation. We forget that this administration believes that the purpose of government is to protect the assets of capital. We forget that military spending consumes 40 percent of every tax dollar. And lest we further forget, with the rise of profit-centered paramilitary organizations such as Blackwater, our military apparatus increasingly operates outside of citizen authority.

To make matters even grimmer, one will search in vain for a coherent moral counterweight to this administration’s seizure of power and sabotage of the Constitution. Despite the Democrats’ rhetoric of withdrawal, there are no plans to dismantle our permanent bases in Iraq, cut the military budget, or reduce the hundreds of global military bases we have worldwide. There are no plans to return our economy to one that serves the commonwealth, that values labor over capital, sustainability over profit, and the rights of neighborhoods over corporations.

In this context of creeping despair, what can the citizenry really do to affect a peaceful transition? Are there any global economic-military policy? Or are we simply fated to continually expand our global empire until, like Rome, our Republic collapses into military dictatorship?

Since I am a pastor, these questions take on an additional urgency. To its credit, most of the global Church judged the invasion of Iraq immoral and unjust. Despite this counsel, conglomerations continued to support the war and bless the troops even in their (theologically speaking) sinful occupation and the theft of another’s land and way of life. And today, although public opinion has shifted, congregations continue to lapse into a spiritual capitulation that all we can do to our economic system is to hope for no liturgies of repentance or lamentation. They offer no spiritual disciplines of penance, either for the soldiers who fight or for the citizenry who fund this unleashing of the demonic.

All of us, both within the Church and outside of it, are facing a world-changing, critical, urgent moral decision. We are at a historical crossroads where we must choose between evolution or empire. As a society we must morally and spiritually evolve so as to be capable of choosing the path that leads to cooperation, compassion, care of the earth, sustainability, and an ability to seek justice through reconciliation. Otherwise, we are scripted to continue down into the spiraling sewer of empire with its competitive anxiety, its intransigence to the defeat of genocide, ecocide, and enslavement of the world’s poor, and the relentless pursuit of economic decadence for a few facilitated by absolute military brutality over the many.

What is needed from the Church is a more faithful spiritual revival: a returning to our roots as an anti-imperial movement equipped with a vastly different worldview. A spiritual revival is a hope-filled optimism about a future worth living. But revival also implies a turning away (i.e., repentance) from a path discerned as leading to certain destruction and despair. A more faithful spiritual revival will summon us as a nation to massively change our economics and our military. It will realign our spiritual priorities and the imperial ambitions that it serves. It is within this context that the Church has the moral responsibility, on behalf of all creation, to wrestle deeply with the theological question, “How do we pray for the peace of our nation so that this war may end and a time of national revival may begin?” The question, and the prayer, must lead to action, courageous decision, and a living example of what a world not dependent on military consumerism looks like. To this question, and this prayer, the Church will stand or fall, evolve or wither, serve the purposes of God or enslave itself to the demands of the demonic. And, I submit, as the Church goes, so goes the nation.

Rich Lang is Pastor of Trinity United Methodist Church in Ballard and the host of a progressive Christian radio show, Living Faith Now (www.living-faithnow.org). He can be reached at oddrew@yahoo.com.
Real Change
May 23 - 29, 2007

Just Heard...

Port recall
After 22 years on the commission, Pat Davis may finally be running aground at the Port of Seattle.

Last week, a King County Superior Court judge approved a petition filed by Renton resident Chris Clifford to recall Davis. In it, Clifford accuses her of malfeasance for signing a memo last year that granted an extra year’s salary of nearly $340,000 to retiring Port Chief Mic Dinsmore.

After the story broke in the Seattle P-I, Dinsmore declined to take the payout, which Davis insists her fellow commissioners agreed to. But, in a five-point ballot synopsis filed with the court, Clifford calls the deal a gift of public money that no one at the Port voted on.

Clifford must now edit the synopsis down to 200 words for the judge’s review, which is expected this week. He will then need to collect nearly 150,000 valid voter signatures to get the measure on the ballot in August or November.

Teamster strike vote
The truck drivers who haul editions of Seattle’s two metro dailies have decided they’re not happy with The Seattle Times and its demand for a wage freeze: On May 20, members of Teamsters Local 174 were nearly unanimous in voting to authorize a strike in the event of a breakdown in bargaining.

The Teamsters’ current contract with the Times Co., which manages the Seattle P-I’s circulation under a joint operating agreement between the papers, expired Feb. 28. Union negotiators said last week to call in a federal mediator.

More Trident arrests
Another Mother’s Day, another trio of arrests at Naval Base Kitsap, home to the Trident submarine’s nuclear arsenal at Bangor.

The arrests took place at dawn May 14, the day after Mother’s Day, as 35 demonstrators lined the road to the base, waving signs at naval personnel as they arrived at Bangor.

The arrests are the latest in a series of protests during the past year. A Seattle judge last week approved a petition filed by Renton resident Chris Clifford to recall Davis. In it, Clifford accuses her of malfeasance for signing a memo last year that granted an extra year’s salary of nearly $340,000 to retiring Port Chief Mic Dinsmore.

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The arrests took place at dawn May 14, the day after Mother’s Day, as 35 demonstrators lined the road to the base, waving signs at naval personnel as they arrived for work. In what has become an annual ritual, three demonstraters — Michael Hill of Elbe, Joy Goldstein of Vashon, and Ann O. of Waldron — then stepped into the road and were immediately arrested by the Kitsap County Sheriff.

Unlike last year’s Mother’s Day protest, when three people who blocked the road spent a day in jail, the three were booked and released.

— Cydney Gillis

Change Agents

What moves people: Teresa Bucker, Debra Cotter, and Margaret Grimm (l-r) make newly un-homeless people feel right at home.

“Furniture donation is especially critical for low income families who are forced to make difficult choices between buying food, furniture, children’s clothes, or school supplies,” explains Teresa Bucker, who co-founded Family Matters, a volunteer-run furniture bank with friends Debra Cotter and Margaret Grimm.

The three draw on their community to donate gently used household items as well as personal time and labor.

Located in the basement of Our Lady of Fatima Church in Magnolia, the organization collects wish lists from social service agencies throughout Seattle and then matches up its inventory with the needs of recently housed families and individuals. Since most of their clients lack transportation, Family Matters partners with Bekins Northwest Moving to provide a free weekly delivery service. To date, they have outfitted 115 households.

Waiting on the housing authority
On June 1, the Seattle Housing Authority is launching a new waitlist procedure it calls “Save My Spot” that housing advocates are already dubbing the “Get Lost” program.

The new program requires the 6,800 people who have put themselves on the agency’s wait list for a public housing unit to check in once a month, as opposed to once a year, to confirm they still need a low-income rental in one of SHA’s 28 high-rise buildings, scattered housing sites or at its Yesler Terrace housing complex on First Hill. Those on the wait list for Section 8 rental vouchers and SHA’s mixed-income developments are not affected.

SHA spokesperson Virginia Felton says the agency mailed a two-page notice to all 6,800 people on the wait list earlier this month telling them of the change. It included an English-only notice and a page offering translation assistance in 16 different languages. But staff at two Seattle service providers report that clients on the wait list have brought them a one-page notice only in English, raising concerns that non-English speakers could be thrown off the list before they have a chance to get help translating the notice.

A Web page and telephone call-in system that SHA has created for people to reconfirm their need is also written only in English, though Felton says translations are on the way for both. The agency hired a mailing service to send out the notices, she says, and it’s possible the second page offering translations didn’t make it into some envelopes.

Far from kicking people off the list, Felton says, the authority is trying to move people into housing faster — by weeding out those, ironically, who may have left a temporary location where they were staying or the entire Seattle area in despair of finding housing. Advocates also say that disabled people on the list will find it tough to comply with a once-a-month check-in — something Felton says the agency can excuse them from altogether, if they ask.

“We’ve actually had a couple of calls on this and we’re concerned about it, because it is not our intention to disproportionately affect people who don’t speak English as their primary language,” Felton says.

To help spread the word, SHA is holding a meeting this week with staff of various agencies that work with non-English speakers. It’s set for Thurs., May 24, 1 p.m., at PorchLight Housing Center, 907 N.W. Ballard Ave. Questions about the monthly waitlist check-in can be directed to (206) 238-1737. Press 0 to get a live person.

— Amy Besunder

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1-866-2-GIVING (1-866-244-8644)

A microphoned street performer draws a crowd at the University District Street Fair May 19. The fair, nearly four decades old, is turning its food waste into compost this year instead of taking it to a landfill. Photo by Katia Roberts.
Observers wonder why the world’s sixth-largest producer of greenhouse gases isn’t doing more

Germany in Losing Battle to Save Last Glacier

By ERIK KIRSCHBAUM, Reuters

The winds are cold at any time of year on Germany’s highest mountain, but the country’s last glacier is melting away despite Herculean efforts to counter the effects of climate change.

Spreading giant anti-glare shields over the glacier each April after piling tons of loose snow upon it, workers are fighting a losing battle to keep the Zugspitze glacier alive — for business and ecological reasons. “We’re doing all we can to preserve it as long as possible, but I’m not God and there’s only so much we can do,” said Frank Huber, the manager of cable car and skiing operations on the 9,718-foot peak in the northern Alps.

One of the world’s most threatened ecosystems, glaciers have been shrinking since the start of the industrial age. Their retreat has gathered speed in the last quarter century. The Zugspitze was 260 feet thick in 1910; now it is only 150.

“I grew up with the glacier, and it’s sad to think one day my children’s children won’t know what it feels or looks like.”

The effort to stave off the demise of the Zugspitze is considerable, but begs the question why Germany, the world’s sixth-largest producer of greenhouse gases, does not do more to tackle the cause of the problem instead.

In her speeches, German Chancellor Angela Merkel often cites the Zugspitze’s state — predicting the national treasure may be gone within 20 years — as an argument for the industrial world to take bolder action against climate change.

As an early warning “global thermometer,” glaciers are extremely sensitive to climate change. One of the world’s most threatened ecosystems, they have been shrinking since the start of the industrial age. Their retreat has gathered speed in the last quarter century. The Zugspitze was 260 feet thick in 1910; now it is only 150.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), set up by the UN, has said glaciers are endangered: “Small Alpine glaciers will disappear, while larger glaciers will suffer a volume reduction between 30 and 70 percent by 2050.”

The melting of the frozen ice is more than just the loss of picturesque mountain scenery. Without glaciers, scientists say summer-time water levels in European rivers would drop. Much of the Rhine River water in the summer comes from glacial melting.

For the last 14 years at Zugspitze, Huber and his staff have spread a giant tarpaulin to deflect the sun, keep the glacier’s ice from melting. Climate change has caused the Zugspitze to lose nearly half its thickness in the past century. Photo courtesy of Street News Service.

A man installs a giant white tarpaulin over the Zugspitze glacier in northern Alps. The tarp will deflect sunlight and keep the glacier’s ice from melting. Climate change has caused the Zugspitze to lose nearly half its thickness in the past century. Photo courtesy of Street News Service.

“We realized if we kept digging the halfpipes, the glacier might be gone in 10 rather than 20 years,” he said. “The effort to stave off the demise of the Zugspitze is considerable, but begs the question why Germany, the world’s sixth-largest producer of greenhouse gases, does not do more to tackle the cause of the problem instead.”

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For the last 14 years at Zugspitze, Huber and his staff have spread a giant tarpaulin to deflect the sun, keep the surface cool, and shield it from the corrosive warm summer rain.

The shield, expanded this year by 50 percent to 30,000 square feet, is supposed to preserve almost 100,000 cubic feet of snow — roughly equivalent to a football field-sized building one story high.

“The shield helps slow the process,” said Huber. “It reflects the sun and helps ice form beneath it. But that and all the other things we’re doing are only going to slow the process down a little bit. We aren’t going to be able to save it.”

During the winter, workers use explosives to set off controlled avalanches on surrounding slopes to push snow onto the glacier. They erect rows of fences on especially exposed parts to slow wind erosion. Some critics say this is a waste of time and money, especially as the tarpaulin only covers a relatively small section of the glacier. Its main aim is to preserve the ski area and the Zugspitze as a glacier for marketing reasons, they say. About 500,000 tourists take the cable-car or cog rail car to the peak from the village of Garmisch-Partenkirchen each year.

Huber said that as a result of climate change, they stopped gouging halfpipes for snowboarders into the glacier. They lost customers in the process, but he said the alternative was worse. “We realized if we kept digging the halfpipes, the glacier might be gone in 10 rather than 20 years,” he said.

“Customers wonder why the world’s sixth-largest producer of greenhouse gases isn’t doing more”
Harsher punishments could face those attacking people sleeping outdoors

Task Force Takes Aim at Crimes Against Homeless

By LAURA PEACH, Contributing Writer

A new protective measure for Seattle’s streets might be on its way. In response to the growing number of violent attacks on homeless individuals nationally, the Seattle Human Rights Commission is looking to revise the city’s current malicious harassment ordinance to include the homeless as a protected population.

If the commission succeeds, any individual who has allegedly targeted someone who is homeless would be charged with malicious harassment as an additional, separate crime.

The ordinance defines malicious harassment as physical injury, property damage, or threats for reasonable fear of harm against a target group of people. It is a gross misdemeanor, punishable by up to a year in jail or a $5,000 fine.

“There is a tremendous danger for the homeless in terms of physical attack and discrimination,” says Alison Eisenger, of the Seattle-King County Coalition for the Homeless. “Since homeless [people] are an already vulnerable population, they are at a higher risk.”

A priority of the Homeless Task Force, a specialized subcommittee of the Seattle Human Rights Commission, was the legislation in response to the growing number of documented attacks on homeless individuals across the nation. The malicious harassment ordinance would be a publicly sanctioned statement that sends the message, says its backers, that targeting people simply because they’re homeless is not acceptable.

The ordinance defines malicious harassment as a key element in reducing the number of attacks. Part of changing the malicious harassment ordinance will include an effort to develop educational campaigns in schools. The Homeless Task Force is hoping that they will be able to get the malicious harassment ordinance altered by late summer to implement educational curricula in the upcoming school year.

The task force held a public meeting May 8 to gather information from the community about the issue. Letters of endorsement have also come in from organizations such as SHARE/WHEEL, which organizes Tent City, and ROOTS, a University District youth shelter. The proposal will be presented to Councilmember Nick Licata at a meeting of the City Council’s Public Safety Committee on June 19.

If the proposal is approved, it will be another step toward making Seattle less dangerous for those who live here, says Wellington: “The homeless should be treated with respect, and feel safe in their city of residence.”

The three-decade-long War on Drugs is really “a war on young people, on the poor, on people of color,” says former SPD chief Larry Gossett.

Seattle’s Drug War ReExamined

By CYDNEY GILLIS, Staff Reporter

The war in Iraq has cost $300 billion. But that’s only a third of what Americans have spent on another war they’ve been waging at home for nearly 40 years.

In 1970, when the War on Drugs began, approximately 1.3 percent of the U.S. population used drugs. Today, sociologist Katherine Beckett says, the ratio of drug use remains the same and is spread fairly evenly across the races.

But the arrests and prison sentences aren’t. Across the nation, a vast number of African-Americans are arrested and imprisoned each year compared with whites. In progressive-minded Seattle, for instance, police arrest 10.7 Black people on drug charges for every white who’s nabbed — a ratio, Beckett says, far above U.S. statistics.

That’s how Seattle’s Black leaders see it. Last week, the Racial Disparity Project, the American Friends Service Committee and Village of Hope hosted a forum in which Beckett and three other speakers — including former Seattle Police Chief Norm Stamper and County Councilmember Larry Gossett — shared other grim statistics in a joint call to end the War on Drugs.

Of the people doing time for drug-related offenses statewide, 25 to 30 percent are African American in a state that’s only 3 percent Black.

— County Councilmember Larry Gossett

cities such as Boston (at 5 to 1) or San Francisco (at 7 to 1).
DRUGS, Continued from Page 5

one third are there for drug-related crimes. But 40 percent of them, he said, are African-American—in a county where Blacks make up just 5.4 percent of the population.

Nearly all of them, he said, “had less than $50 worth of drugs on their person when they were arrested, but the average every one of them is facing is somewhere between three and five years.”

Of the people doing time for drug-related offenses statewide, Gossett said, 25 to 30 percent are African-American in a state that’s only 3 percent Black. Across

the country, 450,000 African-Americans are serving prison terms for non-violent drug crimes.

“We have now spent $1 trillion on an unwinnable and, from my point of view, an utterly immoral war,” said former Police Chief Norm Stamper. “It was not a war on drugs that was declared in 1970—it was a war on people.”

—Norm Stamper, former SPD Chief

“There’s very little evidence,” Beckett added, “that waging a war on drugs reduces drug use or reduces the harm associated with drugs. By contrast, there’s a lot of evidence that making affordable, culturally appropriate drug treatment available can be very effective.”

Stamper advocates legalizing drugs altogether. It’s a goal he works on through Law Enforcement Against Prohibition, or LEAP, a national group of 5,000 current and retired police officers. “We need to replace prohibition with a regulatory model predicated on a public health system,” he said. “Those who are addicted to drugs—any drug, including alcohol—are in need of help…not a jail cell.”

Rich O’Neil, president of the Seattle Police Guild, agrees that arrests do little to stop drug use. But he responds that it’s not up to police to solve the problem. “Their efforts would be better served by focusing on the why it is that people use drugs—is it an economic thing? Is it a social thing?—and what can be done to prevent it,” O’Neil says, “rather than insinuate that because more African-Americans get arrested, there’s some kind of bigotry going on.”

In one hand, yours (it’s the distance!) feels, small.

And the same…broken! feels lost.

Even the first, small! feels growing…

—Stan Burriss

[Resources]

You can see a 12-minute video on the War on Drugs at LEAP’s website (www.leap.org) or visit Common Sense for Drug Policy at www.csdp.org.
Portland’s Sisters Of The Road offers homeless people a safe place to have a nice meal at an affordable price. Now, the Sisters have published a book that shares customers’ stories.

Voices from the Street

By STEPHANIE KNIGHT, Contributing Writer

Sisters Of The Road was founded on a few key beliefs: that everyone deserves dignity; that homelessness is everyone’s problem; and that everyone is responsible for their actions.

Those beliefs didn’t just fall out of the ether; they were distilled from a series of interviews that co-founders Genny Nelson and Sandy Gooch had with people on the streets.

“When we started Sisters, we were two women without resources,” she recalls. “We interviewed customers, and … they let us know what they needed was a place to eat where meals were affordable, the environment was safe, and they could be participants in the program.”

Almost 30 years later, those beliefs are alive and well at the non-profit café where homeless people can eat well and find a place to belong. On a recent visit to Portland to see Sisters, I got a sense for the community effort and mutual respect that makes the place unique. As development associate Orion Gray stated, hospitality at Sisters means “Every person is the face of God. Everyone is sacred and special.”

Gray gave me and my colleague a tour, shared lunch with us, and spent a great deal of time filling us in on the history, philosophy, and mission of Sisters Of The Road. She also told me about the origins of the book the organization has spawned, Voices from the Street — a compilation of another, second round of interviews with Sisters’ customers to understand homelessness three decades after the organization’s beginnings.

Tell me how Sisters works.

The customers work by bussing tables or serving food, running the steam table, or other duties. They are paid at the rate of $6 per hour, which is credited to their meal account. A meal and a drink costs $1.50. We made a commitment that until the food stamp benefit went up.

Why write a book based on interviews with homeless/ Previously homeless people?

The book started as a research project towards the efforts of ending homelessness. You can’t end homelessness without understanding the problem and asking the experts. The people who have experienced homelessness are the experts.

Over what time period did the interviews for the book take place?

From 2001 to 2004. Over that period of years, we started with staff, lost funding, and eventually volunteers finished up the interviews. During the years the interviews were going on, several cuts in Oregon and U.S. social services funding took place.

People have suffered immensely. Every cut means a body count — there are bodies [deaths] associated with health care cuts and welfare cuts and every other funding cut. Things have gotten much grimmer. The situation for women is pathetic.

Genny Nelson co-founded Sisters of the Road Café after a series of interviews revealed that homeless people were looking for affordable meals served with dignity. A second series of interviews is reproduced in Voices from the Street: Truths About Homelessness from Sisters of the Road (Gray Sunshine, 2007). Photo courtesy of author

“when you are homeless, you are on the outside.”

An Excerpt from Voices from the Street, by Jessica Morrell

One of our customers, whom I knew through the Sisters women’s group, once told me about an African tribe that greets each other by saying, “I see you.” I’ll never forget the smile on her face. It blew her mind: three little words that could change the way society looks at you.

In mainstream America, the phenomenon of not having enough money or things makes you hated. Being in homelessness or poverty makes you hated. That’s what has to shift.

Many of our narrators hide their homeless situation from their friends and family. Although Geoffrey receives Social Security, he lives on the streets or in shelters about half of each month because he gives money to his ex-wife and children and he doesn’t have enough to make it through the month.

As our narrators spilled out the stories of their lives, we heard that estrangement, aloneness, isolation, and desperation are common feelings for them.

Jared: “It was kind of like you are nobody. Your appearance has a lot to do with it. There are a lot of homeless people who have long straggly beards, stringy hair. It was kind of like being an ex-con. People looked at you differently, like you are a nobody, you are not worth hiring, not worth taking a chance on. It is basically like being a number … People look at you differently.”

Their self-concept was also affected by the difficulties in maintaining personal hygiene. They hated wearing dirty clothes and not being able to bathe or shave.

Thomas: “Well, you get embarrassed. I’d say maybe if you don’t have deodorant on, you haven’t showered in a week, you got to get on public transportation around other people, keep you from going out and looking for a job, or you wonder what people think about you. You show that you’re homeless.”

Abdel, a Muslim, felt doubly isolated because he hadn’t yet connected with Muslims living in Portland.

Abdel: “I keep to myself a lot, which is good, but it is not good. I should be around people who kind of believe the same things that I do. I am not around the people that I worship with. Most of my friends are back East. … I am just out here by myself. I do not have any support or anything.”

Another of our narrators explained his situation simply but eloquently.

David: “When you are homeless, you are on the outside.”

Justin has been through treatment programs several times and has worked at various jobs, mostly as a cook. He talked often about stabilizing his situation so that he could work again.

Justin: “My main goal right now is to have an apartment. I don’t want to be homeless. I’m trying to do what I can to not be homeless. My friend got beat
Petroleum’s Paradox

Untapped: The Scramble for Africa’s Oil
Review by LESTER GRAY, Contributing Writer

The heart of darkness is about to get darker. So designated by Joseph Conrad in his 18th novel, the African continent was unjustly portrayed as a savage and untamed land. Almost three centuries later, “progress” is making the former misnomer more of a fit.

Through official pronouncements celebrating the decolonization of one African nation after another, much of the world expected that populations long under foreign rule would settle into order and stability overnight. These drastically ingenious prog nostications quickly evaporated in a reality of chaos, war, genocide, and an exciting read. His adventurous efforts to witness events firsthand makes for a page-turner.

Dealing with countless players, economic sophistry, and political entanglements that date back to the colonial era, John Ghazvinian nonetheless produces an exciting read. His adventurous efforts to witness events firsthand makes for a page-turner. After companies began bringing oil out of the ground around 50 years ago, “Along the way something went terribly wrong. The country’s overall economy has shrunk, and the standard of living among its 130 million people has declined steadily.” (The World Bank now rates Nigeria as one of the world’s 20 poorest countries.)

Furthermore, the closer the people live to the drilling in the Niger delta, the poorer they are. In the shadow of the modern edifices and facilities of the oil companies are some of the most impoverished people to be found anywhere. It would be easy to blame the companies. But while these corporations, according to Ghazvinian, genuinely get much of the blame, the situation is at a point where the blend of entangled motives, personalities, and social phenomena have spun out of the control of any one entity. Through a combination of analysis and anecdote Ghazvinian suggests a host of plausible factors.

Equatorial Guinea and Angola are two other countries that Ghazvinian visits, finding variations on the same theme: Not only does the discovery of oil not bring prosperity, it often brings grief: “...studies suggest that the real GDP and the population’s standard of living nearly always decline where oil is discovered. Between 1970 and 1993, for example, countries without oil saw their economies grow four times faster than those of countries with oil.”

Dealing with countless players, economic sophistry, and political entanglements that date back to the colonial era, Ghazvinian nonetheless produces an exciting read. His adventurous efforts to witness events firsthand makes for a page-turner. Unfortunately, his story has no ending in the foreseeable future.

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WORTH SEEING

NOW AVAILABLE ON DVD:

Stomp the Yard (2007); Directed by Sylvain White

Stomp the Yard is another semi-musical held together by a forgettable story line. In the absence of a Gregory Hines, Donald O’Connor, Diana Ross (Lady Sings the Blues), or of course Judy Garland, these offerings are destined to a type of formulaic plateau, a by-the-book safe haven. They’re likely to leave neither producers nor audiences overly excited or disappointed. Stomp the Yard is one of the more successful representatives of this group, leading the box office in three separate weeks in its theatrical release.

DJ (Columbus Short) and April (Meagan Good) are students at a traditional Black college, where steppin’, a dance form, provides an avenue for competition between fraternities both on campus and nationally. While the term steppin’ is widely applied in dance, the style here most resembles a hybrid of an inner-city drill team and an a cappella class, moving to a funky beat.

DJ hails from the ghettos of L.A., the distance from the southern college he attends, with its spoiled and privileged students, being farther than miles could ever express. But this spin-on-the-head, back-flipping, improvisational street dancer has skills that the otherwise haughty frat boys need. While some consider him too ghetto, he could be the key to winning the national competition, the real prize being the provost’s daughter, who dates last year’s top Stepper on campus.

Ping Pong (2002); Directed by Fumikiko Sori

Chances are you could take a sports movie from the last decade, and (allowing for production-style variations and the particular sport) edit them all together, put Ben Affleck in a few scenes as a coach, and nobody would know the difference. A scoreboard with time running down, the underdog team two points behind, and 10 pairs of squeaking Nikes, you’ve got a sports flick. And then there’s Ping Pong.

Made in Japan, the movie visits the deeper questions about sports and competition, avoiding cliches and pat answers while providing a true drama that eclipses redemption for the underdog sagas. “Peco” Hoshino (Yôsuke Kubozuka) is an over-the-top, in-your-face trash-talker whose game is as aggressive as his demeanor. His hisronastics mask a not-so-deep-down insecurity. His friend, Smile (Arata), with whom Peco has shared the sport since childhood, receives little joy from overcoming opponents. Both come to terms with their proclivities in a screenplay that pleasurably mines new insights from the increasingly bare repository where athletic narratives are found.

Plays May 25-31 at the Grand Illusion

Students
You enter life
without opinion
without bias
or hate
You neither like
nor do you dislike...
anything

Nevertheless
socialization begins its campaign
defamation
and demands a certain conformity
A certain sameness
A certain brainless continuation
of hateful insanity
under the banner of learning
And thereby profane purity
which is the first state of human consciousness
with bullsh-t fraught
with bourgeois erudition
Allowing you to look back
one day
and declare with
misinformed arrogance
“My opinions are absolutely correct
I’ve been taught well”

—Jay Cornelius
Let's talk about fertilizer!

First, though, let's out Anitra "Happy Ending Every Time" Freeman. Anitra molestes tomato plants! I thought you all should know.

The building where we live has a garden for residents like Anitra who need to plant or grow plants. Tomatoes are among other things. Two days ago, I'm not making this up, she wanted a vibrator for the tomatoes. Yes, THAT kind of vibrator. She said she wanted to help them "self-pollinate." Sick.

Then, yesterday, she said some of the plants she "helped" weren't old enough. Anitra is molesting underaged tomato plants! I thought you all should know.

Bus Chick: Ordinary Heroes

Carla Sauter

Earlier this month, I attended the Transit Authority's exhibit at SOLL Gallery (www.sollart.org): The Adventures of Transitman. Here's how the artist (a.k.a. former Sound Transit artist-in-residence, Christian French) describes his project:

"A meditation on the power of choice, and the ramifications of its exercise, this project expresses some of my assumptions about the hidden capacities we all have to make a difference in the world. Every act has infinite consequence. Even a simple choice like how you commute."

Finally, a superhero a bus chick can get behind! (No Batmobiles necessary.)

The exhibit runs through June 3. If you make time to check it out, you'll see, in addition to cool photographs and comic panels, and a seriously sexy yellow and red superhero uniform, the artist's version of a bus chick bag: a briefcase that contains a notebook, keys, a copy of Real Change (seriously) and an old-school flask. Now why didn't I think of that?

She's also been pouring "tea" on the garden. Not the tea you drink. It's foul compost tea. She gave me some for the houseplants and I left some lying around. I came home to find the place smelling like a steaming outhouse. She said, "Oh, so it's true what they say, it DOES spoil quickly." I'm glad we both feel the same way!

Speaking of learning, I got to thinking about fertilizer. You know, you can learn a lot about the world by picking out just any random concept like "fertilizer" and tracking down what's been done with it.

First, what is fertilizer? Fertilizer is plant food. OK, and what do plants eat, Wes? Almost any awful thing you can think of. There's crap, slurry (water and crap), blood, bone, worm crap, sewage, seaweed, limestone, urea, salt-peter, Chilean salt-peter, bird guano, bat guano, and seal guano.

Salt-peter is potassium nitrate. Chilean salt-peter is sodium nitrate. Urea is a source of salt-peter. So is guano, which also provides phosphorus and phosphates with which to make so-called superphosphate, which big farms spray on crops to feed them and, indirectly, us.

In the ninth century, a Far Eastern alchemist who wanted an elixir to enable him to live forever had mixed up some sulfur, rat poison, and some crystals solidified out of urine. "That should do it," he thought, and then it blew up in his face, literally.

Plants don't just get energy from nitrates. Explosives get energy from nitrates, too.

Governments also get energy from nitrates.

First, they get energy from nitrates to fuel explosives. Explosives get energy from nitrates. Governments also get energy from nitrates. What they do with the energy is another story.

Shaking up a powder of the right proportions, the ramifications of its exercise, this project expresses some of my assumptions about the hidden capacities we all have to make a difference in the world. Every act has infinite consequence. Even a simple choice like how you commute.

Take it from their Capitol Hill home to his elementary school a little farther north. Being the cool (and highly intelligent) parents that they were, they said yes.

After Tom had proved himself able to get to and from school without incident, he expanded his bus repertoire, buying all-day passes on the weekends so he could explore the city. It wasn't long before he started memorizing schedules. (Some kids put together puzzles or model trains; budding transit geeks study bus schedules.)

And speaking of Bus Chick heroes... Tom Bakker, also known as the Human Bus Schedule, is one of the finest.

It all started back in the day, when Metro was still Seattle Transit, and six-year-old Tom wanted to try riding the bus. First, he asked his parents if he could take the bus to school. They said yes. They then told him if he had a copy of the SODA order — Occidental Park is in zone 1. Bus Chick at buschick@gmail.com or blog.seattlepi.nwsource.com/ buschick

Get something to say about public transportation in Seattle? Email Bus Chick at buschick@gmail.com or blog.seattlepi.nwsource.com/ buschick

This accomplishment has earned him a fistful of local notoriety (including an appearance on Evening Magazine that has been repeated 23 times since 1996) and at least one huge fan.

Tom has never owned a car, and, like most transit geeks, gets almost anywhere in the Pacific Northwest on the bus. Unlike most transit geeks, he can tell you how to do it (including which routes to catch, transfer locations, and wait times) without consulting a single reference. Perhaps we should call him the "Human Trip Planner."

I think Tom and Christian should team up and form an alliance — like the Superfriends — and use their powers to help bus riders in distress. If I keep improving my bus skills, they might even let me join. I always did like Wonder Woman...
Because the project cost isn’t even mentioned in either piece, Real Change readers should know that the total price tag for these 50 individual units (tiny 320 square foot “efficiencies”) is presently projected at over $15 million — more than $300,000 per unit, exclusive of essential services and maintenance, and more than THREE TIMES the amount budgeted in the 10-Year Plan for needed housing. At this rate, necessary housing would cost $275 million to build in 2007 alone, not $82 million.

His surprising personal attack aside, Mr. Sims advances excellent arguments why we must try to end homelessness. Those same reasons mandate that anyone who truly cares about our homeless brothers and sisters hold our leaders on homelessness accountable: To do their homework, explore all options — including a countywide homeless facility siting policy — and make certain that we’re getting the biggest bang for the taxpayer buck.

“Anyone who truly cares about our homeless brothers and sisters hold our leaders on homelessness accountable: To do their homework, explore all options — including a countywide homeless facility siting policy — and make certain that we’re getting the biggest bang for the taxpayer buck.”

faces [a] $25 million shortage in 2007 alone.” Without focusing on any specific project, Gillis reports that the official business plan budgets $82 million to meet an overall target of 925 additional housing units in 2007, not including another $7.5 million for mental health and other essential services. Bottom line: At about $88,650 per unit, we don’t have nearly enough money to build all the housing we need in just the second year of the 10-Year Plan.

In a separate Real Change opinion piece last week, “If We Say No, How Can We Ask Anyone to Say Yes?” [May 9], King County Executive Ron Sims endorses the proposed DESC 50-unit homeless project for the Columbia Hillman City neighborhood on Rainier Ave. S. Totally devoid of financial data, Mr. Sims instead dismisses local opposition to the project as NIMBY attacks based upon “ignorance and fear.”
CALL TO ACTION

Ensure More Resources for the Homeless

**Issue:** The Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing Act (HEARTH) reauthorizes the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Programs that are administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). HEARTH amends the HUD definition of homelessness and improves support for all homeless populations.

**Background:** The HEARTH act provides greater decisionmaking at the local level, more closely aligns the HUD definition of homelessness with other federal agency definitions, expands resources for emergency shelter and supportive services, provides a framework for greater homelessness prevention activity, and allows communities the flexibility to implement a range of housing solutions. Specifically, the HEARTH Act:

- Consolidates all HUD McKinney-Vento housing programs (except Emergency Shelter Grants) into one competitive program with a broad set of eligible activities, including homelessness prevention, permanent or transitional housing for any homeless population, and supportive services. This is the first time that homelessness prevention would be an eligible activity under the competitive portion of HUD’s homeless assistance grants.
- Aligns the HUD definition of who is homeless more closely with the definition used by other federal agencies, including homelessness prevention, permanent or transitional housing for any homeless population, and supportive services. This expands resources for emergency shelter and supportive services for homeless persons living on the streets.
- Provides greater decisionmaking at the local level, more closely aligns the HUD definition of homelessness with other federal agency definitions, expands resources for emergency shelter and supportive services, provides a framework for greater homelessness prevention activity, and allows communities the flexibility to implement a range of housing solutions.

**Action:** Contact your U.S. Representative with the following message:

“The HEARTH Act, H.R. 840, will help communities respond to homelessness in rural, suburban, and urban areas by providing greater flexibility and more resources. It will help make HUD homeless policy more sensitive to the needs of all people experiencing homelessness, including families and single adults, and is therefore a critical part of a broader strategy to prevent and end homelessness. Please sign on as a co-sponsor to H.R. 840.”

Rep. Jay Inslee, 1st District: jay.inslee@mail.house.gov
Rep. Rick Larsen, 2nd District: rick.larsen@mail.house.gov
Rep. Dave Reichert, 8th District: house.gov/reichert
Rep. Adam Smith, 9th District: house.gov/adamsmith

For more information visit: www.npach.org/hearth

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SISTERS, Continued from Page 7

up the other night and got his sleeping bag stolen and his eye blackened. They didn’t need his sleeping bag. They were high. That’s the kind of shit that goes on, on the streets. The worst thing is I feel bad and ashamed. I feel bad that I don’t have a job or a house. I’m 30 years old. Most people my age do.

Charlie talked frankly about how drugs and alcohol had interfered in his life. He was in recovery at the time of our interview, and described how feelings of isolation had exacerbated his situation.

“I feel like I was too proud to show what I had become, to my sisters and ask for help. I was just too proud to ask for help anymore, although I really did not ask them for help for helping me since they are both deceased. I did not have anybody to call on.”

**Courtesy of Gray Sunshine. ©Street News Service; www.street-papers.org**

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**NOTICE OF PROPOSED SETTLEMENT**

**OFFICIAL COURT NOTICE IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF WASHINGTON**

Price, et al. v. City of Seattle, et al., No. CV03-1368L.

**TO: ALL REGISTERED OWNERS WHO PAID TO REDEEM THEIR VEHICLES FOLLOWING IMPOUND BY THE CITY OF SEATTLE ONLY FOR DRIVING WITH LICENSE SUSPENDED (DWLS) VIOLATIONS BETWEEN MARCH 28, 2000 AND DECEMBER 27, 2002.**

The notice concerns the proposed settlement of a class action alleging that the City of Seattle unlawfully impounded vehicles for DWLS violations. The settlement provides for reimbursement of fees paid by registered owners to redeem their vehicles from impound. The settlement was negotiated by Class Counsel, Adam Berger of Schmauck Goldman & Berdes, 610 Third Avenue, Suite 500, Seattle, WA 98104.

**SUMMARY OF THE PROPOSED SETTLEMENT**

- The City will establish a $33,3 million settlement fund for reimbursement of towing, storage, and administrative fees paid by class members to redeem impounded vehicles. If the total of all claims exceed the size of the fund, reimbursements will be reduced pro rata to fit within the limits of the fund.
- The class is limited to owners whose vehicles were impounded solely for DWLS violations as stated on the SPD Vehicle Reports accompanying the impound and who redeemed their vehicles from impound.
- Class members must submit verifiable claims to class counsel in order to obtain reimbursement.
- Class counsel will ask the court to award up to $25,000 in attorney fees and costs from the fund.
- The agreement allows the City and its insurance carriers to use the money to target the City’s DWLS diversion program.

**HOW TO FILE A CLAIM**

- Claim forms must be submitted to Class Counsel by August 31, 2007.
- Claim forms may be obtained at www.agb-law.com/impoundclassaction, or by calling the Impound Class Action hotline at 1-800-424-5259.

**FURTHER INFORMATION AND PROCEEDINGS**

A final hearing on the proposed settlement will be held at the U.S. District Courthouse in Seattle at 9 a.m. on July 5, 2007. You may submit written comments in support of or opposition to the settlement by filing with the Clerk of the Court, via e-mail to Class Counsel and/ or the City (Stadium Frey Cooper, 601 Union Street, Suite 3000, Seattle, Washington 98101), or at www.agb-law.com/impoundclassaction, or by calling the Impound Class Action hotline at 1-800-424-5259.

**DATED:** May 1, 2007

**BY ORDER OF THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF WASHINGTON**

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A few hours a week can make a difference.

To learn more, visit our website: www.realchangemagazine.org/volunteer.html
All She Needed

All she needed was
a hand to hold
someone to be there
not leaving
someone to talk to
saying, “This sucks,
I never imagined
it would be so.”

And I said to her
“It’s not the kind of thing
we plan for.”

She looked at me full—
dark, hollow nursing home eyes
suddenly lit, searching for
the thread of connection
nodded affirmation
and the wild, frightened animal
reflex sat back
instantly calmed
upon being received.

—Kristen Spezarth