

Hayward Demos Democratic Club

September 2005 Newsletter

Editors: Jim Forsyth(581-5169), Peter Hendley(582-7011)
www.haywarddemos.org

Hurricane Katrina Aftermath by Craig Williams

Two potentially pragmatic solutions to the Katrina Tragedy might be an 'Empty Nester Project' and a 'Rosie the Renter Rebuilding Project.' I have thought about doing something with these concepts for a while and have even approached elected officials and other decision makers about their benefits. They seem to be something which could help in the short term as well as long term for the hurricane victims.

Short term, in a perfect world, wealthy people would open up their palaces to the hurricane victims. Surely someone with 4000 sq. ft. and six bedrooms of living space could spare a little room. In reality another option would be to canvass neighborhoods and ask senior citizens who were empty nesters if they could allow a victim to stay with them in their spare bedroom. I for a while have felt this might be a partial solution to the homeless tragedy. Something like one in five homes is occupied by a senior citizen and a significant number of senior citizens are empty nesters. Doing this in Houston and other cities where people are living in stadiums will keep people together, where they will be able to meet weekly for support as well as for political reasons. Democrats could take up this project and show the country how they can help people and solve problems at the same time.

A second long term solution might be a Rosie the Renter project for rebuilding the damaged housing with the victims participating in the reconstruction. A project modeled after the Rosie the Riveter project could give victims hope. It could be something that a lot of people could understand and get support from both the left and right, be a great theme and even have a nostalgic patriotic feel to it. The country also needs to create higher density housing and this could be a model which might help us save ourselves from global warming.

We have a limited amount of space in our newsletter and we could not do justice to a critique of the things the Republican Administration has done wrong from the onset of this catastrophe

Calendar

Thursday, Sept 15, 4-8:30 Hayward Downtown Street Party

Saturday, Sept. 17 7-11 Gay Pride Festival B St Hayward

Sept. 22, 6 pm Democratic Unity dinner. Call Robin 635-3121

Saturday, Sept 24 11 am Bring the Troops Home Now March & Rally. Dolores Park S.F.

Thursday, Sept 29, 7 pm A film about Rachel Corrie, crushed in Palestine by an Israeli bulldozer. All Saints Church, 2nd & D Sts, Hayward

President, Craig Williams 636-0643
Vice-president, Mike Villalba 636-1432
Secretary, Alison Corson 881-1802
Treasurer, Ginny DeMartini 781-0944
Membership Director, Al Mendall 441-7487
Webmaster, Jeff Winkler, At large: Elsa Glines, Mary Hayashi, Pat Kellner, Tom Kersten, Thom Kunselman, Mary Ann Reno, Harry Scott, Rick Trullinger

September Meeting

Friday, September 23, 7 pm
Westminster Hills Presbyterian Church
27287 Patrick Ave., Hayward (Across from Weekes Park Library)

The meeting will discuss and take action on the candidates and measures on the November 8 ballot. Hayward School Board incumbents Paul Frumkin and Myrna Truehill are facing challengers. All of the candidates have been invited to speak. The first part of the evening will be a discussion of ballot propositions 74-80 led by a speaker from the Alliance for a Better California. (Demos recommends No on 73) The Alliance is sponsored by a united union movement. It is working with our United Democratic Campaign and may be reached at 510-569-3655 or www.betterCA.com.

*** **

Club [News:Membership](#) Director Al Mendall reports that we now have 195 paid 2005 members. The Club executive board recommends to the membership that \$500 be shared by school board candidates endorsed at the Sept. 23 meeting. A California Clean Money Campaign speaker will address our Oct. 21 meeting. A joint United Democratic Campaign-Alliance for a Better California phone bank is being held in six locations Monday-Thursday 5:30-9 pm from now til Nov. 8., including the United Food and Commercial workers hall, 28870 Mission Blvd. (nr. Tennyson). Call 885-1970 to sign up. Weekend precinct walking will happen. Call the Alliance at 569-3655 for details.

* *

Barring a last minute acceptance by Sutter Health of a federal mediator's compromise settlement, a system-wide strike will start September 13.

Congressmember Nancy Pelosi stated that the mediator's offer (accepted by the union) "provides caregivers with a real voice in staffing decisions to ensure that patients come first, establishes a training fund ...and guarantees that patient care dollars will not be wasted fighting employees who want to join the union."

In response to Assemblymember Johan Klehs' announcement that the Rev & Tax Committee, which he chairs, will investigate Sutter's apparent abuse of its tax exempt status as a non-profit, the hospital workers union said, "Sutter appears to be behaving in every way like a for-profit corporation. It has a network of for-profit subsidiaries, including a wholly-owned collection agency in Modesto." It's record includes "using tax-exempt bonds to expand it's market share in lucrative locales and profitable procedures when such [tax exempt] financing was intended to reduce prices; shutting down less profitable services and methodically slashing charity care; and price gouging the uninsured. By doing so it has amassed enormous profits."

by Two short videos will be shown. "Do No Harm" explores the way pharmaceutical companies have become the most profitable sector of the economy, through political influence and monopoly pricing power and how we can fight back. "No More Deaths," the second video, looks at the dangerous journey thousands of people are being forced to undergo crossing our southern border in search of a livelihood, and of the valiant efforts to save their lives.

* *

State Senator Liz Figueroa, featured speaker at the Demos July 29 meeting, spent an exciting evening with an appreciative audience of almost 50 persons. Demos applauded Liz, who is of Salvadoran heritage, as she told of her efforts to urge the California Congressional delegation to vote against the Central American Free Trade Act (CAFTA). The bill was narrowly passed by two votes in the House of Representatives after passing the Senate [Unfortunately it has been subsequently signed by the President] Liz stated that it threatens American jobs without improving Latin American working conditions. She emphasized the need for Health Care reform in California and urged the attendees to support State Senator Sheila Kuehl's Bill SB 840, co-sponsored by Liz, which would provide universal health care to Californians. Liz related that she has greatly appreciated the support of the residents of the 10th Senate District for two terms.[the core of which is in Alameda County including Castro Valley, Fremont, Hayward, Newark, San Leandro, San Lorenzo, and Union City]. She stated that Civil rights issues have been at the forefront of her work beginning with her membership in the Fremont Human Rights Commission. She recently introduced Senate Joint Resolution SJR 10, which calls on the California Congressional Delegation to vote against provisions of the USA Patriot Act that impinge on Constitutional rights and prohibits state agencies from enforcing such provisions. This bill will be voted on the floor of the Senate after recess ends on August 15. It will then go to the Assembly for vote. Persons in other Senate Districts and Assembly Districts should call their legislators to vote yes on the resolution.

Liz concluded that she is very disappointed with the mean-spiritedness of Legislators that has grown during her two terms in the State Senate. Republicans are using scare tactics in discussions. She will be "termed out" in 2006 and has announced her candidacy for Lieutenant Governor in 2006.

A study released by the Foundation for Taxpayer and Consumer Rights California (FTCR) today found **oil company profiteering** and the government's failure to respond to it are the cause of recent gasoline price spikes in California.. The study showed, for example, that from January 17th to April 18th 2005 gasoline prices jumped 65 cents per gallon and refiner profits rose by 61 cents per gallon. The extra four cents went to the state in increased sales tax collection. The study concluded that California's percentage sales tax provides an economic incentive for government officials to promote high prices at the pump because they result in greater tax collection -- an estimated \$1 billion more in California during 2005 due to the price gouging. The consumer group recommends a "windfall profits rebate" be instituted. "Oil company profiteering, not increased production costs, is the cause of the price spikes at the gasoline pump and Californians deserve their money back," said FTCR

which participated in the Attorney General's Gasoline Pricing Task Force. "Hurricane Katrina will only increase the probability of profiteering and should be a wakeup call to legislators."

"The continued failure of public officials to compel refiners to create more refining capacity and increase inventories will result in gasoline prices rising to \$4 per gallon relatively soon," stated FTCR. "The system is rigged for price spikes and the refiners know it."

The study examined the causes of the doubling of the average price of gasoline from \$1.36 per gallon on January 03, 2000 to \$2.72 on August 15, 2005. Among the main findings are: Increases in the prices charged for oil by OPEC countries are not primarily responsible for the dramatic increase in gasoline prices in California. Much of California's crude oil is harvested locally by major refiners who control their own fields. OPEC nations only supply approximately 20% of the oil delivered to refineries in California. Fields controlled by the oil companies in California or Alaska provide the majority (66%) with the remaining 14% coming from non-OPEC foreign locations. California consumers will pay an estimated increase of \$15.5 billion more at the pump in 2005 than in 2000 because of profiteering by oil companies and government's failure to act. No public evidence exists of substantive increases from 2000 to 2005 to oil companies in the cost of a) producing crude oil; b) refining oil into gasoline or diesel; or c) transporting the refined products to market. The 2005 California gas prices spike -- with pump prices increasing from \$1.93 of January 17 to \$2.72 by August 15th -- was directly tied to the exportation of large quantities of motor fuel in 2005. By exporting fuel out of the country, refiners and traders deliberately decreased available supplies during a period of peak demand. Inflated profits for California oil companies from their refining operations -- including an **increase of 61¢ per gallon in profits** from January 17 to April 18 -- were a principal factor in the jump in gasoline prices. California, which also collects a gasoline excise tax, is one of only 9 states that maintains a sales tax on purchases at the pump. Gasoline price increases in California will increase collections of the 7.25% state/local sales tax during 2005 by an estimated 6¢ per gallon (40%) or approximately \$1 billion -- creating the largest gas tax increase in the history of the state. While gasoline sales tax collection increased by over 150% after adjustment for inflation since its enactment in 1972, the minimum wage level, also set by the legislature, has fallen nearly 12.5% during the same period.

* *

The following is from an article by Derrick Jackson in the *Boston Globe*:

Of the world's seven most profitable corporations, four are ExxonMobil, Royal Dutch Shell, BP, and Chevron. ExxonMobil is the world's most profitable company, making \$25.3 billion last year. It and the other three corporations had combined profits last year of \$72.8 billion. ExxonMobil is also the world's most valuable company, with a market value, according to Forbes magazine, of \$405 billion. The combined market value of ExxonMobil, BP, Royal Dutch Shell, and Chevron is nearly \$1 trillion. And that was last year. A month ago, ExxonMobil, Chevron, and ConocoPhillips announced record second-quarter profits of \$7.6 billion, \$3.7 billion, and \$3.1 billion, respectively. Royal Dutch Shell's quarterly profits

of \$5.2 billion were up by 34 percent over the same period last year. Other well-known companies like Sunoco also had record second-quarter earnings.

If ExxonMobil were to maintain its current pace of profits, it would cross the \$30 billion barrier for 2005. The company's chief financial officer, Henry Hubble, bragged in classic corporatese, "Our disciplined project management and operating practices deliver the benefits of strong industry conditions to our shareholders."

Those disciplined operating practices are hardly confined to the oil fields. Everyone knows that Bush does not really mean what he says about price-gouging at the pump, since he just gave energy companies the bulk of \$14.5 billion in tax breaks in the new energy bill. Surprise, surprise. In Bush's two elections, oil and gas companies gave Republicans 79 percent of their \$61.5 million in campaign contributions, according to the Center for Responsive Politics. ExxonMobil and big oil are looting the nation, and no one declaring martial law on them.

The following article was sent to us by Diana Prola. It first appeared in Tomdispatch.com

WHAT ARE WE TEACHING OUR CHILDREN?

by Chris Christensen

In our small town of Columbus, Texas (pop. 3,900), we buried one of our local sons on his 19th birthday. He was killed in action in Iraq on June 20. He was a friend of my two oldest sons, and his father was a friend of mine.

There is not a lot for a young man to do in our town, and most leave for college or a job. Christopher came to see me at his father's request prior to enlisting last summer. I am an Air Force vet who served in Southeast Asia. I talked blue in the face to try to get Christopher to go with me to an Air Force or Navy recruiter. In fact, I told him in no uncertain terms that the Army would put a gun in his hands and send him out to be a target. He wouldn't listen.

His head was already filled with a lot of crud from the recruiter about being a scout, riding a four-wheeler ATV around--big fun! He had an acquaintance who had been doing that (not in Iraq) and I got the sense that this acquaintance was giving him the hard sell, too. I wonder if the Army has a referral bonus system.

Christopher also had this inexplicable desire to "go shoot some 'Raquis." Maybe some latent desire from too much video gaming. I heard that in the weeks before his death, he was involved in a brief firefight and froze in terror. No doubt reality caught up to him at the speed of a 7.62 caliber bullet. Too bad his recruiter or buddy had not told him about the fear he would experience when he realized someone wanted to really hurt him or kill him.

When I learned of Christopher's death, I was sitting in a hotel lounge in Manhattan. I broke down and cried. There were lots of others around and I'm sure they were wondering. . .but none asked. I found I was crying not so much for the senseless loss of a young life, or even the grief our friends would bear. As I thought about it, I was crying for our country. What have we come to?

This is my sadness. Our children are being weaned on hatred and violence in this country. It starts with television, gets reinforced and is refined with violent video games (one is produced and distributed by the U.S. Army), and finally the infection spreads through violent team sports in high school. Football in the South is the battlefield training ground for the next generation of cannon

fodder. Kids are told to go out there and "hurt 'em, tear 'em up, kill 'em." It is ingrained. (Careful now, don't get me confused with the liberal left. I own guns and support conservatives. There is a huge difference between defense of home and property and exporting violence to other countries.) Christopher didn't know it, but as a small-town Southerner, he was being trained for his death since early childhood.

Our little town votes mostly Democrat in local elections, but typically votes Republican in presidential races. Discussion or debate about policy in public is seldom heard and somewhat discouraged. What a shame. Most people around here take a passing interest in national or foreign policy for a week or two prior to an election, then just turn back to football, or whatever is covered on the sports page that day.

The notion of death or dismemberment at the hands of an enemy is so foreign as to be incomprehensible to most American youth. Our media does such a precise job of keeping images and details of such things out of the public eye. Not so for many foreign presses. Our schools would never consider teaching children about anything so morbid or unpleasant.

The thought that a boy like Christopher would so lightheartedly desire to kill some people he knew nothing about is very distressing to me. On the one hand, Christopher was a pretty gentle and easygoing kid. If someone had said to him, "Hey, let's go shoot some kids from Sealy," a rival school, he would obviously have said, "You're crazy--get lost.!" But 'Raquis, why it's open season.

He only saw the differences. He had somehow developed enough hatred to override his sense of right and wrong, and all teaching of love of fellow man. He went to the Southern Baptist Church, and I know it was taught to him. On the other hand, the president of the Southern Baptist convention declared this a "just war." A little hypocrisy there and probably confusing for Christopher. We left that church, by the way.

A few men and women who knew Christopher had been supporting the occupation, but are now beginning to change their minds. His death is the second our rural county has experienced in the past few months. It is beginning to change some attitudes here--but too late, I'm afraid.

I hope that we learn sooner than we did in Vietnam that we can't successfully force our ideals on another society unwilling to adopt them or defend them for themselves.

There just aren't enough Christophers to go around.

Chris Christenson is a veteran of the Air Force.

** **

Jurors and Americans learned through the Vioxx trial in Texas that Merck executives knew the cardiac risks of Vioxx as early as 1997, but continued to aggressively market the drug as safe.

The headline grabbing \$229 million punitive damage award decided on by the jury was not chosen at random, but represented the exact amount of money Merck made by delaying changes to the drug's warning label after a study showed Vioxx caused five times as many heart attacks as a competitor.

Despite the clear will of the jury, Texas law automatically reduced the punitive damages to \$1.6 million, an amount Merck made in Vioxx sales every 8 hours and 40 minutes the drug was on the market.

Punitive damages are rare but essential. As the Vioxx case shows, jurors award punitive damages to punish egregious behavior and discourage corporate executives from putting

sales before safety. If a bill recently passed by the House of Representatives and pending in the Senate had been in effect before the verdict, the aggrieved widow would have received just \$250,000 for the loss of her husband and limited reimbursement for his lost wages. The CEO of Merck made \$37.8 million in total compensation in 2004.

(from atla.eneews@atlahq.org)

My brush with the law or traveling to Cuba by Jim Forsyth

There's nothing like a visit to our southern neighbor Cuba to reveal in all its ugliness U.S. foreign policy. For a country which professes to believe in democracy, free trade, anti-terrorism, competition in ideas, people-to-people diplomacy, it is an eye-opener.

Pastors For Peace, a religious organization, has conducted humanitarian aid caravans for dozens of years to Cuba, Chiapas, Nicaragua, among others. This year's was the 16th to Cuba. It consisted of buses and trucks loaded with donated medical supplies, bicycles, baby food—and a few computers. PFP on principle refuses to apply for a license from the U.S. government, maintaining that our right to travel to Cuba is constitutionally and morally protected. The caravan, in fact, is designed to openly challenge the blockade as an act of “civil obedience.”

Faced with over a hundred “caravanistas” and a long line of buses at a congested border crossing near McAllen, Texas, the U.S. blinked. After a day-long standoff and one bus being towed away, we were allowed to proceed on our route to Tampico, Mexico and on to Cuba, with the exception of a dozen computers and parts destined for school children with special needs. These computers were loaded on a bus which to this day sits in a vacant lot, awaiting further negotiations and/or political pressure. (We are calling on our Members of Congress to protest to Secretary of Commerce Carlos Gutierrez to release the computers.)

Yes, the blockade of Cuba, tightened under the Bush Administration, still continues. But tons of medical aid and over 100 U.S. citizens did defy the travel ban. More importantly, a message of solidarity from the U.S. was sent to the Cuban people who refuse to bow before our cruel and vindictive attempt to strangle the Cuban revolution. It is an effort that is failing. The U.S. stands virtually alone in the world in terms of violating diplomatic norms of behavior toward a country with which it is at peace.

Pastors For Peace leader Rev. Lucius Walker, who remains with the computers, said, “Cuba will survive with or without our aid. It is the example that Cuba sets for the world, a small nation attempting to create a just society in the face of overwhelming difficulties, that will enable all of us to survive.”

P.S. Just as predicted, caravanistas have begun receiving vaguely threatening letters with questions to be answered from the Office of Foreign Assets Control, part of the Treasury Department.

* * *

Media Matters by Kathleen Lilley (Cont'd from June)

The airways belong to the public, yet by and large are controlled by the corporations and commercial interests. State-sponsored National Public Radio is underwritten by corporations (essentially advertising money), while the reach of non-commercial, listener-sponsored Pacifica Radio is growing, but is still limited. Air America (where Al Franken can be found) is an attempt to put liberal/left views on AM radio. [AM 960-“the quake”]

The 1996 Telecommunications Act relaxed media ownership restrictions and allowed the media conglomerate Clear Channel to gobble up former competitors. Clear Channel now dominates radio as well as live entertainment promotion. The Justice Department is now investigating anti-trust accusations against the Clear Channel. Other conglomerates, such as Radio One in urban markets, have virtual monopolies. In 2000, the FCC ruled that community radio stations broadcasting up to 100 watts could be started up by non-profits. Unfortunately, Congress then passed a law which took away from two thirds of the larger cities the ability to broadcast public affairs. No stations were granted licenses in the top city markets, only in the small towns. A big issue has been the licensing of FM “translators” – transmitters that enable the radio waves to go over hills. While activists were lobbying for city coverage, the FCC allowed corporations to get licenses for translators so that local stations were shut out. As for AM radio, this is usually the domain of fundamentalist Christian and rightwing stations.

In 2003, progressives won a significant victory over the Federal Communications Commission, or FCC, and its Chairman at the time, Michael Powell, by successfully going to court to oppose his proposed ownership rules to increasingly consolidate media ownership. The court was impressed that 2.2 million people commented on it and so the public prevailed over the corporate media.

The new Chair of the FCC, Kevin Martin, is thought to be a clone of Michael Powell. Martin's wife works for Cheney and he has been hailed as the Christian Right's candidate. The FCC Commissioners this year consist of two Democrats, two Republicans and there will be one or possibly two vacancies. Here is room for plenty of public input.

Children in the US watch more TV than any other activity besides sleeping and going to school. The average US viewer sees 28,000 commercials a year. Twelve billion dollars per year are spent on US advertisements aimed at small children. And, as we know, political campaigns in this country are waged as a war by advertising agencies. Polls went up by 10% for Bush when Bush spent \$55 million, while Kerry spent \$5 million. The public exactly mimicked the language of Bush's commercials: “Kerry waffles.” “Kerry will raise taxes.”

The television networks are owned by some of the largest corporations in the world:

- NBC is owned by General Electric
- CBS is owned by Viacom
- ABC is owned by Disney
- CNN is owned by Time Warner
- Fox is owned by Rupert Murdoch's News Corp.

Members of the boards of directors of these corporations also sit on the boards of weapons manufacturers and other companies with vested interests around the world, such as Boeing, Coca-Cola, Texaco, Chevron, Lucent, Daimler-Chrysler, Citigroup, Xerox, Philip Morris, WorldCom, JP Morgan Chase, Rockwell Automation and Honeywell. NBC's owner GE, for example, makes parts for every nuclear weapon in the US arsenal and makes jet engines and military aircraft.

Cable TV companies are working tirelessly to make it illegal for anyone but themselves to provide Internet and phone service. There is a phenomenal organizing opportunity right now for the public as many more airwaves become available, as the radio, TV, and other systems go from analogue to digital.

Public television is under pressure from the right, as Bill Moyers has so eloquently stated. According to the *New York Times*, Kenneth Tomlinson, the chairman of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, has “repeatedly criticized PBS as too liberal over all and has said that his goal is to satisfy a broader constituency...Mr. Tomlinson has also hired a staff member from the Bush White House to set up guidelines for the ombudsmen hired to critique shows on public broadcasting, and he is trying to hire a State Department official, a former co-chairwoman of the Republican National Committee, as the corporation’s president and chief executive.” (To be concluded next month)