Memorial Day weekend, as it has for many years now, marks the official beginning of summer. In the Midwest, it’s when it becomes prudent to put your tomato plants in the ground, but here in California, they’ve been set out for weeks, and have even set fruit in some Bay Area banana belt hot spots. Around here, it’s the first opportunity to plan neighborhood barbecues with some confidence that they won’t be rained out (though perhaps not this year). With all the opportunities for Fun in the Sun, it’s easy enough to forget why we celebrate this holiday. And though it’s traditionally a mellow, reflective time, some stressful controversies have been in the air this year.

First, the history: Someone sent me an article from a Cleveland online paper which claimed that it was started by freed slaves in Charleston, South Carolina:

“According to Professor David Blight of Yale University’s History Department, the very first Memorial Day was observed by former black slaves at the Washington Race Course in Charleston, S.C., at the end of the Civil War. The race course had been used as a temporary Confederate prison camp in 1865 as well as a mass grave for Union soldiers who died there. Immediately after the cessation of hostilities, the former slaves exhumed the bodies from the mass grave and reinterred them properly with individual graves.

They built a fence around the graveyard with an entry arch and declared it a Union graveyard. The work was completed in only 10 days.

On May 1, 1865, a crowd estimated at 10,000, including many black residents and 2,800 children, proceeded to the location for sermons, singing, and a picnic on the grounds. It was proclaimed the first Decoration Day (and later Memorial Day).”

We’ll dispense with citations, since the article on further research appears to have been lifted almost verbatim from a Wikipedia article, which in turn was lifted from....but no matter.

Other claimed Decoration Day (as it used to be called) founding sites per Google are Waterloo, New York and Petersburg, Virginia. This weekend President Obama revived a Mississippi version:

“A group of women visited a cemetery in Columbus, Mississippi to place flowers by the graves of Confederate soldiers who had fallen at Shiloh,” he said. “As they did, they noticed other graves nearby belonging to Union dead. But no one had come to visit those graves, or place a flower there. They decided to lay a few stems for those men too, in recognition not of a fallen Confederate or a fallen Union soldier, but a fallen American.”

Well, yes. Our president does love to try to bring everyone together, doesn’t he?

Like most mythology, each of these stories probably contains a large kernel of truth. The overarching point is that it’s been considered proper to give thanks and praise to those who died trying to do what they thought was right for their country.

It’s deeply ironic that this Memorial Day week should mark the final push toward repealing the unsatisfactory “don’t ask, don’t tell” stratagem for dealing with the historical fact that there have always been gay members of the military forces. It’s true
that there have been prohibitions against them, but it’s also true that reasonably discrete gay people, both men and women, have always been a sizeable percentage of the military population, just as they are in the rest of society.

And not just on the battlefields. Walt Whitman, now most often claimed to have been gay, spent many months during the Civil War caring for wounded soldiers in Washington hospitals—he even wrote a book about it. The complete details of his sexual orientation are still the subject of discussion, since in those days it was not as common as it is now to make public pronouncements about sexuality.

If it wasn’t being used as a subterfuge to keep gays out of the service, “don’t ask, don’t tell” might not be a bad policy, and not just for the military. Endless rehashing of banal sexual encounters, regardless of whom of what gender they were with, can be intensely boring for those forced to hear about them in unwelcome detail.

On the other hand, the contemporary openness about sexual orientation has had positive effects. Recent polls suggest that three out of four Americans now think that gay people should be allowed to serve in the military on equal terms with their straight brothers and sisters. Chances are that the 75% who think that’s all right have actually worked with gay colleagues, and are aware that they’re fully capable of doing any job, including military service. Most families have acknowledged gay members, even families of politicians, even dreadful families of politicians like Dick Cheney’s, whose gay daughter seems to be every bit as mean as her father. It’s time for the government to catch up with public opinion on this topic.

This Memorial Day it was veterans of World War II who were most remembered, since they have now almost all faded into history. My cousin and her husband were visiting, as he kept track by telephone of his favorite uncle, who was slowly sinking in another city. The uncle was a decorated veteran of the Battle of the Bulge—his nephew said ruefully that when he told his own grown grandchildren about this, they asked what the Battle of the Bulge was.

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The preceding paragraphs were written on Sunday morning. And on Sunday night as I went to bed I noticed that the excellent Truthout website had forwarded an early Haaretz story about the Israeli commando attack on the Gaza flotilla. Since several local citizens were participating, I put the story and some links to it up as a news flash.

When Mike stopped in at the former Planet office on Monday morning, he found that someone had thrown an egg at the front door and plastered the premises with “Fight Islamic Terrorism” bumper stickers.

In the mailbox were a couple of self-asserted pro-Zionist pamphlets, including one juvenile screed that said “The Gruesome Twosome: Far Leftist and Islamo Fascism Both Love to Hate Western Civilization.” (Evidently the ignorant writer did not know that much of what is now part of “Western Civilization” originated in the Middle East—“algebra” is an Arabic word.) We haven’t filed a police report, because there’s no way of knowing which of the small handful of fanatics who are consumed with hatred of the Planet is responsible.

When some of the same element previously went after the Planet, one of their targets for some inexplicable reason was my late father. As my sister noted in an outraged letter to the New York Times, he fought in World War II to save the sorry of hides of jerks like this (she said it more politely than I.)

But the sneaky vandals who on Sunday night targeted the building which has been the Planet office for the last seven years should be aware that we’ve largely moved out already. The owners are the family of a California-born Japanese-American who served with distinction in the Pacific theater during World War II in the same cause as my father did. This building, which was his family home for many years, should not be desecrated by know-nothings whose liberties he fought to save.

And the rest of us should appreciate and celebrate the sacrifices of those who have gone before us by continuing to work for justice for everyone everywhere in the world, including for gays in the military and Palestinians in Israel.

Abraham Lincoln said about the veterans of another great war, “It is for us, the living, … to be dedicated … to the unfinished work which they have, thus far, so nobly carried on.” Still a good plan.

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**Editor’s Back Fence**

**Berkeley News On Tap**

**Wed May 26 10:30:00 -0700 2010**

For a quick look at what they’re saying about Berkeley in the media, consult the City of Berkeley News Scan, assembled by a local consultant who checks everything out and posts the best stuff from various sources. Her job is to make sure that those in city government know what’s being said about them, but the rest of us want to know too.

It’s even possible to subscribe to the News Scan and have her send you updates as they happen.

**Bezerkeley Stories**

**Mon May 31 08:30:00 -0700 2010**

These are the stories the metro papers love to write: Funny Stuff Going on in Quirky East Bay Town. Here at the Planet we’re pleased that they’re doing this so we don’t need to bother. Think of these as our soft features.

From the brand-spanking new Bay Citizen:

From the old but still the same San Francisco Chronicle:

What would they ever do without Berkeley?

By the way, it’s a topic we covered in 2005, but our civic arts commission is always good for a laugh.

**What Are Those “Press Releases” Doing Here?**

**Tue Jun 01 12:32:00 -0700 2010**

By now many readers are wondering what’s up with the “Press Release” label. It’s simple: we’re trying a radical experiment. Much of what you read in the press these days is nothing more than re-written press releases with little original reporting involved. We’re just eliminating the
disingenuous middle-person and posting the releases cold turkey. In no way do we vouch for the truthfulness of the information contained, we’re just the messenger passing through the statement of the authors.

Let us know whether you think this is all right.

News

Report Says That El Cerrito Resident Was Beaten By Israelis

By Jane Stillwater (Partisan Position)
Tue Jun 01 15:47:00 -0700 2010

San Francisco Bay Area resident Paul Larudee, who is instrumental in Berkeley’s Free Palestine Movement, was taken and detained by Israeli commando forces on Monday. Official Israeli sources are stating that their peaceful boarding parties were met with violent resistance by passengers on the ships they were boarding and that the boarding parties only used force when necessary to protect themselves.

However, I have known Paul for many years and his whole credo is one of non-violent resistance. Working with the NorCal branch of the International Solidarity Movement since approximately 1996, Paul is very much a believer in and practitioner of Gandhi’s principles of non-violence.

Given what I myself know about Paul, it seems rather odd that Paul would have been mercilessly beaten by Israeli forces. Yet I and other members of FPM just received the following e-mail stating that he was badly and, according to another e-mail I just received, “brutally” beaten:

“Hello, my name’s Lindsey, I’m living in 28 Blake St, Onge is a civil engineer working overseas with the Gaza flotilla. We just got an email from the Israeli Consulate General Andrew Parker in Jerusalem.

“He said that Paul is alive and seriously beaten. Paul told him to call us so this is the closest contact we’ve got so far. He asked us to spread the word as much as possible.

“Paul silently refused to follow Israeli orders so they beat him. Now he’s being held in prison. He’s in the same room with the captain of the boat. They have no windows, no telephone, nothing. He refused treatment by Israeli doctors, and only let the ship doctor give him aspirin.”

Furthermore, I am currently receiving several other reports from various European, Greek and Turkish eyewitnesses that the Israeli boarding forces hit the ground running, armed with stun guns, tear gas, metal batons, rubber bullets, etc. and with clearly violent intent.

East Bay Citizens Condemn Israel Attack on Gaza Aid Flotilla

By Riya Bhattacharjee
Tue Jun 01 14:17:00 -0700 2010

A group of East Bay citizens have joined the growing international protest against the Israeli Navy’s raid on the Gaza aid flotilla, sending out e-mails condemning the action and planning protests scheduled to start as early as 4 p.m. today.

At least five Bay Area residents, including three from the East Bay who belong to the Free Palestine Movement based out of Berkeley’s historical Grassroots House on Blake Street, were part of the Gaza relief mission.

Free Palestine Movement activist and writer Henry Norr told the Planet Tuesday that none of the Bay Area activists aboard the international Freedom Flotilla are back in the U.S. yet.

Norr said Ambassadors Edward L. Peck, who served as a paratrooper during two tours of wartime active duty, and Joe Meadors, a signalman who survived Israel’s attack on a U.S. Navy surveillance ship 43 years ago and is now a member of the FPM, were released and returned to the U.S. today.

“Both arrived at Newark airport about 4 a.m. and Amb. Peck arrived home safely at 9:45 a.m. this morning and was greeted by TV crews staking out his house,” in Chevy Chase, Md., an e-mail update to FPM members said. “He is in good spirits and raring to go to speak with the press, which will be ongoing and incessant.”

The three East Bay residents are Paul Larudee of El Cerrito and Janet Kobren and Gene St. Onge of Oakland. Larudee and Kobren are co-founders of the Free Palestine Movement. Larudee, who is a piano tuner by profession, also co-founded the Free Gaza Movement which broke the first Gaza siege in 2008. Kobren is a retired math teacher and St. Onge is a civil engineer working with Palestinian engineers to rebuild housing destroyed in Israel’s 2009 invasion of Gaza.

According to members of the Free Palestine Movement briefed on the situation, Larudee and Kobren are currently being detained in Israel.

Larudee’s family reported Tuesday afternoon after receiving a call from the U.S. Consul General in Jerusalem Andrew Perkins that he was badly beaten and remains in detention. An e-mail from Lindsey Baggette, a family friend staying with Larudee’s wife Betty while he is overseas, said that “Paul had told [Perkins] to call us so this is the closest contact we’ve had so far. He asked us to spread the word as much as possible.

Betty was the one that talked to Parker but now she is upset and doesn’t want to talk to anyone until she gets an e-mail from the consulate tomorrow … Paul silently refused to follow Israeli orders so they beat him. Now he’s being held in prison. He’s in the same room with the captain of the boat. They have no windows, no telephone, nothing. He refused treatment by Israeli doctors, and only let the ship doctor give him aspirin.”

Norr said that the other two Bay Area residents are Kathy Sheetz, a nurse from Marin who is often in Berkeley to take part in protests, and Lara Bell, a filmmaker of Korean-Brazilian descent who lives in San Francisco.

Norr said details are still emerging about how many people were killed or injured.

“The big picture in this outrage is that Israel is not releasing any information.” Norr said. “They are not allowing people to communicate with their families.” Norr said that St. Onge’s wife Jan received an e-mail from the State Department which had originated in the U.S. embassy in Tel Aviv that her husband was safe and would be released in 72 hours.

“So Gene is OK,” Norr said. “A friend of Janet’s who was listed as her contact received a similar e-mail. Kathy Sheetz is on a YouTube video which someone took when some of the passengers from the flotilla were being taken to an Israeli detention facility in Ashdod. She is apparently unharmed.”

Sheetz’ husband Steve Greaves told the Planet in an e-mail that Col. Ann Wright, U.S. Army Reserves and a former diplomat, was the white-haired woman just before Kathy Sheetz, who is the last person seen being escorted to detention tents in the video.

Greaves said that Sheetz was initially on the Challenge-2, renamed the SS Audacity of Hope, but eventually moved onto the Greek-flagged Sfendoni.

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The U.N. Security Council condemned Israel’s attack on the flotilla Tuesday.

“Speaking for FPM, the whole point of this flotilla was to bring some desperately needed supplies to 1.5 million people in Gaza who have been under strict siege for four years,” Norr said. “That’s the real point-to bring aid and to expose the stupidity and the inhumanity of this blockade. I think the flotilla has accomplished something in reminding the world of this ridiculous situation where Israel thinks it can starve all these people. There is no legal basis for this siege.”

Berkeley resident Jane Stillwater, who has been monitoring the flotilla journey of her friends Larudee and Kobren said:

“The Israelis are only releasing a hand footage defending their action. They are being imposed as a form of collective punishment of Gazans, a flagrant violation of international law.”

At an April 15 UC Berkeley student senate debate about whether the university should divest from investing in two American companies providing military weapons to Israel, a UC Berkeley student from Gaza testified how her family was living without basic amenities such as clean water.

“Can you imagine living in a place where you don’t even have clean water?” the girl asked during a brief emotional speech.

According to Norr’s email, the Freedom Flotilla was carrying 10,000 tons of relief aid to Gaza, including chocolates, crayons, soccer balls, basket balls as well as medical equipment and building supplies which were to be delivered by the international community directly to the people of Gaza “using only international waters and the coastal waters immediately off of Gaza for passage.”

In an update Sunday, Norr wrote that the Sfendoni with its passengers had moved through waters near Limassol, Cyprus the day before. He added a comment from Larudee who said that “while passing by we enjoyed a quick swim with some dolphins and then they escorted us on our way. We take this as a very good omen indeed.”

Protests planned against the raid on the Gaza aid flotilla:

Bay Area Emergency Protests: Tuesday, June 1, 4:30 p.m., Israeli Consulate, 456 Montgomery St., San Francisco. Future Actions: Friday, June 4, 12 p.m., interfaith action, San Francisco City Hall; Saturday, June 5, 11 a.m., mass mobilization, San Francisco Civic Center

World Cant Wait: Tuesday, June 1 at 4:30 p.m., protest at the Israeli Consulate, 456 Montgomery Street, (between California & Sacramento), San Francisco.

Justice for Palestine: Saturday the 5th of June is being called the Global ‘Break-The-Siege’ Day by organizing protests and demonstrations in front of Israeli embassies and consulates all over the world. http://www.breaksiege.com/call-for-action-global-day-to-break-israeli-siege/

Mayan Refugee Given
Two More Weeks Before Deportation

By Janna Brancolini (BCN)
Fri May 28 09:34:00 -0700 2010

Immigration officials have declined to reopen the case of a 22-year-old Mayan refugee who is scheduled to be deported in
two weeks based upon what his Bay Area lawyers call a miscommunication from 2002. Mario Mendoza’s lawyers say he deserves to be granted political asylum in the U.S. because he crossed the border as a young teen and could be attacked if he returns to Guatemala. East Bay Sanctuary Covenant, a Berkeley-based group, has been helping Mendoza with his case.

But immigration officials are upholding a 2003 deportation order against Mendoza because he missed an immigration hearing years ago.

“This individual’s immigration case has undergone extensive review by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, and by the immigration courts,” ICE spokeswoman Lori Haley said in an e-mail. “At this time, he does not have a legal basis to remain in the United States.”

Mendoza’s lawyers, however, feel the review has been inadequate. The deportation decision did not take into consideration his age of contact with immigration officials or his ethnicity, Mendoza’s lawyer, Nancy Powell said in an e-mail.

Mendoza came to the United States in 2002, about six years after Guatemala’s 36-year civil war ended. Hundreds of thousands of people were killed in the conflict, and indigenous populations were attacked, according to the CIA fact book.

Mendoza crossed the border with five other people, none of whom he knew prior to the crossing or planned to have contact with afterward, Powell said. At the time, he only spoke Mam, an indigenous language of Guatemala.

The agents who picked up Mendoza’s group arbitrarily selected one person and named him the “lead respondent,” Powell said. That person provided an address for future correspondence.

After he was detained, Mendoza was released and ordered to appear at an immigration hearing, but he did not understand the instructions, according to Powell. Court officials sent a notice about the hearing to the address that the group member had provided, but the letter never reached Mendoza, Powell said.

Mendoza missed the hearing, so the judge issued an “in absentia” order of removal, meaning Mendoza was to be deported as a result. Last month, the judge declined to reopen the case because, saying Mendoza had been given sufficient notice of the hearing.

However, Powell said, “The ICE paperwork that generated the case has numerous errors. It says he was traveling with a cousin; he was alone. But the main problem is slumping people together and calling it ‘adequate notice.’”

Mendoza didn’t realize the court had ordered his deportation and spent the next five years supporting himself through odd jobs, Powell said.

In 2007, he returned to Guatemala for a cousin’s funeral, according to a spokeswoman with the East Bay Sanctuary Covenant.

In Guatemala, members of a local security committee beat Mendoza and his grandfather because Mendoza’s father had sided with guerrillas during the civil unrest, sister Maureen Duignan of the Sanctuary Covenant said.

Mendoza returned to the United States, and in 2008, he sought legal asylum through the East Bay Sanctuary Covenant. He had lost track of his family, but the group reunited him with his mother, who had already obtained asylum years earlier with their help, Duignan said.

It wasn’t until he applied for asylum that Mendoza discovered he was supposed to be deported, Duignan said. Officials tagged him with a monitoring bracelet, and he was ordered not to leave California.

Mendoza was scheduled to be deported Tuesday morning but was granted two more weeks in the United States, Duignan said. He has never been arrested.

Duignan said the Covenant will do whatever it can over the next two weeks to keep Mendoza in the country, including appealing to Congressional representatives.

“He should have his day in court,” Duignan said. “He got that deportation order when he was a child. He had no idea what to do, no fixed address, no place to go.”

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**Endangered Species Act: Noah’s Ark or Titanic? (News Analysis)**

*Craig Collins, Ph.D.*
*Tue Jun 01 11:49:00 -0700 2010*

The Endangered Species Act is the equivalent of a tiny bandage on a gaping wound. Congress passed the ESA in 1973 under intense public pressure to save a growing number of species from extinction. Groups like Greenpeace and the World Wildlife Fund fostered sympathy for the plight of cute or charismatic creatures like pandas and blue whales to raise awareness about the extinction crisis. These campaigns were so effective that the media still portrays the struggle to preserve biodiversity as an altruistic endeavor pressed upon society by tree-hugger environmentalists seeking to rescue creatures on the verge of extinction.

This perception was fairly accurate back when extinctions seldom topped 100 a year. At that pace, it seemed reasonable for the ESA to list species for protection one at a time. But those days are over. Today, untold thousands face extinction because the ecosystems they inhabit are collapsing under the relentless assault of human encroachment. Many biologists believe we have instigated the 6th great extinction episode in Earth’s history; some estimate the pace of extinction has soared to 100,000 species a year. Renowned paleoanthropologist, Richard Leakey, believes half of the Earth’s species will vanish within 100 years and warns that this die-off could come sooner if greenhouse gases wreak havoc with the Earth’s climate. Preserving biodiversity is no longer an altruistic enterprise—it’s a matter of human survival.

Without nature, we’re toast. We really need this to “sink in” before it’s too late. The mysterious collapse of bee colonies around the world threatens all the crops they pollinate. The alarming die-off of North American bats is wiping out a major insect predator that prevents our harvests from becoming bug food. The acidification and warming of the oceans undermines the survival of the corals and zooplankton that sustain the marine food chain.

We have to stop thinking of “nature” as something we visit while camping or watch on the Discovery channel. Nature purifies our water, pollinates our crops, regulates our climate, recycles our wastes and provides us with food, clothing, medicine and shelter. We can’t survive without it. Preserving biodiversity isn’t about saving charismatic creatures—it’s about saving ourselves.

So, has Endangered Species Act reduced the rate of extinction in the United States? The 1,925 species officially listed as threatened or endangered under the ESA are just a small fraction of the creatures facing extinction. The exact size of this fraction is difficult to determine because of the vast number of plants and animals we know little or nothing about. But biologists estimate the law only covers between 1 and 30 percent of all species facing extinction in the US.

The ESA’s arduous listing process is its most onerous defect. Listing species for protection one-by-one, instead of preserving the integrity of entire ecosystems, is an expensive, rigorous, time consuming ordeal
constrained by scientific ignorance, bureaucratic intransigence, political pressure, partisan politics and budgetary shortfalls. Species designated as “candidates for listing” wait on average 20 years to get listed. Meanwhile, many go extinct. But even species lucky enough to be listed have a slim chance of survival. Only 19 of the 1,925 listed species have recovered enough to make it off the endangered list. This abysmal 1 percent recovery rate is the result of pernicious loopholes in the law.

The ESA requires every endangered species to be assigned a critical habitat and a recovery plan. However, this rarely happens because the agencies in charge of enforcement have been hijacked by powerful mining, timber, oil and gas interests who oppose all restrictions on their exploitation of natural resources. Agency officials misuse minor legal exemptions to deny critical habitat designations to over 80 percent of all listed species and leave 40 percent without recovery plans. Consequently, only 10 percent of all listed species are improving. 30 percent are considered stable and 60 percent continue to slip toward extinction.

The overriding weakness in the ESA is that no legal barrier can possibly halt the juggernaut of economic escalation at the heart of our extinction crisis. Human intrusions like urban sprawl, deforestation, road and dam building, industrial agriculture, grazing, mining, oil drilling, over-fishing, marine pollution, and harvesting wild species for food, sport and profit all continue to shred the web of life that supports us.

The ESA’s inability to slow the pace of extinction reflects the fact that we are caught up in a malignant economic system so driven by the demands of consumption and profit that it must devour, expand and pollute at a suicidal pace. Reversing this unfolding calamity is beyond the scope of any law. It requires the transformation of our entire economic system to bring it into balance with the planet.

Craig Collins, Ph.D. Author of the newly released book, TOXIC LOOPHOLES: Failures and Future prospects of Environmental Law (Cambridge University Press) Teaches environmental law & policy at California State University East Bay (Dept. of Political Science)

The city of Oakland won a legal victory today when a judge said he will grant its bid for a preliminary injunction against a gang that it alleges is notorious for violence.

Alameda County Superior Court Judge Robert Freedman said the city presented “clear and convincing evidence” that the North Side Oakland gang is a public nuisance and its members should be prohibited from conducting certain specified activities in a 100-block “safety zone.”

The injunction won’t go into effect immediately because the parties involved in the case must still agree on the final wording.

But Oakland Deputy City Attorney Rocio Fierro said it will go into effect soon.

“We’re very grateful,” she said.

City Attorney John Russo said the city is targeting the gang because of severe and increasing violence associated with the gang. He said the gang was involved in 18 serious crimes in 2009, including seven murders.

But the ACLU of Northern California and the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights of the San Francisco Bay Area filed friend of the court briefs opposing the proposed gang injunction, alleging that it would give the Oakland Police Department wide discretion to label people gang members without having to present any evidence to a judge or even charge them with a crime.

The injunction applies to 15 alleged gang members that are named in the city’s suit.

The city originally named 19 suspected gang members, but four people were removed because they’re already in jail for a pending triple murder case and aren’t expected to get out of jail anytime soon.

Among the injunctions restrictions against gang members are not associating with other gang members in public, not confronting or intimidating witnesses, not possessing firearms or other weapons and not participating in drug activity.

Violating the injunction would be considered contempt of court and be a criminal misdemeanor offense punishable by up to six months in jail and a fine of up to $1,000.

Russo said gang injunctions were upheld as constitutional by the California Supreme Court in 1997.

At today’s hearing, which was attended by nearly 100 people, Fierro said the case “is one of the most important in the city’s history because of the public safety concerns that are involved.”

Fierro said, “We are not asking that the defendants be put in jail but instead are asking that they stop their behavior.”

She said the gang has jeopardized public safety to the extent that sometimes “people go to church with bullets going by their heads.”

Opponents of the injunction have alleged that it might lead to racial profiling, but Fierro said outside court that that’s not true. He said police submitted hundreds of pages of documentation against the people named in the suit and its enforcement will be supervised by the court.

Freedman said he will have another hearing within the next six months to review how the injunction is being implemented.

Katz said the city is considering seeking similar injunctions against other gangs but hasn’t yet filed any other lawsuits.

Jewish Voice for Peace urges Jewish leaders to denounce Israel’s increasing violations of human rights and dignity.

From Jewish Voice for Peace
Fri May 28 10:59:00 -0700 2010

In just 24 hours, over 3,000 sign open letter to Abe Foxman, David Harris and Marvin Hier

[San Francisco, May 28, 2010] National peace group Jewish Voice for Peace is taking its call for equality and freedom for Israelis and Palestinians directly to the leaders of the American Jewish community. Appalled by a dramatic increase in the Israeli government’s anti-democratic actions against both Palestinians and Israeli citizens, combined with silence from Jewish leaders, Jewish Voice for Peace urges its supporters to sign an open letter addressed to the heads of leading Jewish human rights organizations: Abe Foxman of the Anti-Defamation League, David Harris of the American Jewish Committee, and Rabbi Marvin Hier of the Simon Wiesenthal Center.

The action is already JVP’s most successful ever with over 3,000 signatures in just 24 hours.

JVP launched the campaign on May 27 with a letter from Deputy Director Cecilee Surasky saying:

These Jewish organizations came into existence at a time when my family - and so many others - needed them desperately, and their contributions and achievements on behalf of Jews and non-Jews made me proud. But times have changed, and the missions of these groups have changed. All too often, advocacy for universal human rights has taken a back seat to their belief that they

Judge Says He Will Issue Injunction Against Gang

By Jeff Shuttleworth (BCN)
Thu May 27 20:58:00 -0700 2010
must support the Israeli government unconditionally.

For example, as I write this, it has been 22 days since Israeli citizen and human rights activist Ameer Makhoul was brutally taken from his home in the middle of the night, held without charges, denied a lawyer for 12 days, and most certainly tortured. All under cover of an Israeli media gag order. Regardless of the charges against him, which were only announced today, it is hard to imagine these groups remaining silent in the face of such outrageous repression in a modern democracy. Especially against an Israeli citizen.

Yet they say nothing. The pattern is not new.

It is painful for me to say that today these organizations - organizations with such a proud history of civil and human rights - for many of us have come to stand for the exact opposite. Sadly, I now find myself opposed to the American Jewish Committee, the Anti-Defamation League, and the Simon Wiesenthal Center for dismissing criticism of Israel as anti-Semitic, for putting Israeli foreign policy above Armenian genocide recognition, for vilifying Muslims and Arabs, and for building a “Museum of Tolerance” on top of a Muslim cemetery in Jerusalem.

Jesse Bacon, editor of JVP’s blog The Only Democracy? said:

“Since we started ourblog March, documenting the struggle for democracy in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories, things have gotten steadily worse. Every day brings news of another midnight raid, torture, and detention without charge of another human rights activist.

What’s more, often these abuses can’t even be reported on in Israel because of media gag orders. We’re documenting increased crushing of non-violent protests, attempts to silence NGO’s in the Knesset, and even the banning of international visitors simply because of their ideas. And yet American leaders who support Israel remain silent. Their silence in the face of increasing government repression serves no one, least of all Israel’s Jews.”

The campaign will also include call-in days and other attempts to bring the message to leaders until they speak out against these human rights abuses. Because they still have the ear of high level Israeli officials, JVP believes their words could make an impact.

About JVP:

Jewish Voice for Peace is the only national Jewish organization that provides a voice for Jews and allies who believe that peace in the Middle East will be achieved through justice and full equality for both Palestinians and Israelis. With offices in New York and California, 100,000 online activists, chapters across the country and an advisory board comprised of numerous prominent Jewish thinkers and artists, JVP supports nonviolent efforts here and in Israel-Palestine to end Israel’s Occupation, expand human and civil rights, and implement a US policy based on international law and democracy. JVP opposes anti-Jewish, anti-Muslim, and anti-Arab bigotry and oppression and seeks an end to the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem.

Full Text of the Open Letter

An Open Letter to the leaders of the Anti-Defamation League, the American Jewish Congress, and the Simon Wiesenthal Center.

Dear Abe Foxman, David Harris, and Rabbi Marvin Hier:

As leaders of major Jewish organizations that defend human rights, democratic values and civil rights for all, you have rightly and vigorously condemned repression where it occurs around the world.

That’s why your silence as Israel becomes more and more repressive each day deeply concerns us.

As Israel uses anti-democratic tactics against Palestinians and increasingly, its own citizens, what will you do to stop it?

Will you remain quiet while Israel rounds up its own citizens like Dr. Omar Said and Ameer Makhoul (1), who was arrested in the middle of the night in front of his children, held without charges, denied a lawyer for 12 days, tortured, and then disappeared under a strict media gag order which was partially lifted after widespread protest?

Will you say nothing about the arrests of Palestinian nonviolent leaders like Omar Alaaeddin (2) and Abdallah Abu Rahmah (3); the lethal shooting with tear gas canisters of people like Bassem Abu Rahmah (4); the incarceration of Israeli Jewish nonviolent leaders like Ezra Nawi (5); and harassment of the members of Israeli peace groups like New Profile (6)?

Will you stand by and allow legislation (7) to criminalize the human rights organizations that are the best representatives of Israeli democracy?

We call on you to speak out against the repression of the civil and democratic rights of Palestinians and Israelis. We ask you to call for an end to the crackdown on nonviolent human rights activists and organizations, both in Israel and in the Occupied Territories.

We are Jews and Muslims, Americans and Israelis, Christians and atheists, parents and grandparents. We are united by our belief that all people deserve equality and freedom. And like you, we each have a personal stake in a peaceful future for Israelis and Palestinians.

We ask you to heed the words of Elie Wiesel who said, “We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.”

We are waiting.

(1) Ameer Makhoul is the director of “Ittijah,” the network of Arab NGOs in Israel, and a human rights activist. Were a civil society leader representing a minority group in a democratic state to be arrested and tortured by his own government in any other state, we would count on our Jewish organizations to protest.

(2) Omar Alaaeddine’s arrest and torture.

(3) Abdallah Abu Rahmah’s Letter From Ofer Jail.

(4) Bassem Abu Rahmah’s shooting.

(5) Ezra Nawi’s Website.

(6) New Profile’s letter about their harassment.

(7) Adalah on the proposed legislation to restrict NGO’s.

PRESS CONFERENCE, TUESDAY, JUNE 1, Berkeley Warm Pool

From Robert Collier
Tue Jun 01 12:28:00 -0700 2010

What: Condemning the Big Lies against Measure C: Berkeley Mayor Tom Bates, former Mayor Shirley Dean, and other City Council and School Board members will hold a press conference denouncing the Karl Rove-style disinformation tactics of the opponents of Measure C in Berkeley’s June 8 election.

Why: Using a strategy right out of the Karl Rove play book, the anti-everything crowd (NO on schools, libraries, fire protection) now is attacking our pools. Measure C with wildly false claims to create doubt and confusion. Their many whoppers include these:

LIE #1: The warm pool can be repaired in its current location -- False. They know the pool is scheduled for demolition by the School District.

LIE #2: Measure C will cost $3.5 mil-
lion annually for maintenance, plus an annual inflation adjustment. False. They have created this totally out of thin air.

**LIE #3:** Willard is already a competition-size pool. False.

**LIE #4:** UC Berkeley campus has a Warm Pool. False.

We relish a good debate, but dishonesty, right-wing tactics cannot be allowed to stand anywhere, any time. Measure C is about our kids, our seniors, our future.

Measure C is a $22.5 million bond measure and parcel tax in Berkeley’s June 8 election to rebuild and repair the city’s four municipal pools.

Who: Mayor Tom Bates, former Mayor Shirley Dean, and other Council and School Board members. Berkeley Unified School District Superintendent Bill Huyett is invited. Measure C supporters (disabled in wheelchairs, and Barracudas youth team members in goggles) will attend alongside the speakers.

When: 4:30 pm, Tuesday, June 1.

Where: Berkeley Warm Pool, 2246 Milvia Street & Durant (inside gate). The press conference will be held indoors on the deck of the Warm Pool, the decrepit and controversial facility that is scheduled for demolition next year -- and that Measure C will rebuild at a separate site. <

Yes on Measure C campaign
www.berkeleypools.org
www.facebook.com/berkeleypools

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**Orange County Superior Court Rules that County Mapping Database is Exempt from the California Public Records Act**

*From Dean Wallraff, Vice Chair of the Sierra Club Angeles Chapter’s Legal Committee*

**Thu May 27 09:45:00 -0700 2010**

Santa Ana, CA - May 21, 2010 - An Orange County Superior Court judge ruled today that mapping data maintained by Orange County is exempt from the California Public Records Act (PRA). The PRA says that state and local agencies must provide copies of public records in their possession to members of the public requesting them, and they must not charge more than the direct cost of making the copy. Ruling on a suit brought against Orange County by the Sierra Club, Judge James J. DiCesare held that mapping database maintained by the County, which details the location and boundaries of land parcels within the county, is a “computer mapping system” and exempted under the software exemption of the PRA. The PRA law provides that software is not a public record, and the Court decided that parcel mapping data stored in a GIS database is included in that exemption.

“The County recognized that parcel mapping data is a public record, but was supported by the Court in refusing to provide the data in its normal database format,” says Bruce Joffe, GIS consultant and founder of the Open Data Consortium project, who participated in a similar, but successful, suit against Santa Clara County brought by the California First Amendment Coalition (CFAC) in 2007. “Using the PRA software exemption to block distribution of the County’s database is as if the Judge ruled that a Microsoft Word file was software because it was part of a word processing system.”

Sierra Club attorney Theresa Labriola, of the firm Venskus & Associates, indicated that the Club was likely to appeal. “CFAC won a virtually identical case in the Court of Appeal. We believe that the Santa Clara decision is binding precedent in this case. Orange County successfully argued that the software exception wasn’t addressed by the Santa Clara appeals court, but we think it was. We’ll appeal, we will win, and we’ll put this argument to rest once and for all.”

Although the PRA says the public has a right to government information in the same electronic format that the government uses, the Court supported the County’s claim for the software exemption. The Sierra Club believes that the exemption for “computer mapping systems” in the law pertains only to software and not to the database that holds the County’s data. The County convinced the Court that its “Landbase” database is a GIS database and that GIS databases are part of “computer mapping systems” as included in the PRA software exemption. Nowhere in the PRA text is “computer mapping system” actually defined. At the time the exemption was written (1988), “computer mapping system” typically meant a set of software modules used for producing map graphics; the phrase did not mean the underlying data and database.

According to a study undertaken by Joffe and his colleagues, 48 out of the 57 California counties that maintain their parcel map data in electronic form provide it to the public for the cost of reproduction, as required by the PRA. Of the non PRA-compliant counties, Orange County is by far the most egregious offender, asking $375,000 for its mapping data that includes approximately 640,000 parcels of land.

The main reason Orange County refuses to provide its parcel mapping data to the public under the terms of the PRA may be that the County would lose revenue from data users that currently pay hefty fees for the data. Documents filed in the case show that Orange County has received an average of $183,530 in annual licensing revenue from its “O.C. Landbase” database over the last five years. “These high fees create two levels of access to public records,” says Dean Wallraff, Vice Chair of the Sierra Club Angeles Chapter’s Legal Committee. “Title companies, real-estate companies and large developers can buy this data, while nonprofit environmental organizations cannot afford the cost. What’s galling is that we’ve already paid for the Landbase through our taxes. The public owns this data. Why should we have to pay again for what is already ours?”

GIS Consultant Joffe states that the reason for the Public Records Act is to enable any citizen to oversee our government’s activities. “Transparency leads to accountability, and transparency is only possible if the public has access to the same data, in the same format, that the County uses.”

The Sierra Club needs parcel data to prepare maps for its conservation campaigns in Orange County. The Club is currently fighting to preserve open space from development at Banning Ranch, Coyote Hills, Orange Hills, and Hobo Aliso. Lore Pekrul, current Chair of the Sierra Club Angeles Chapter GIS Committee states, “we’re at a disadvantage relative to the big developers when we prepare maps showing land being targeted for development in Orange County. They can afford parcel data, which lets them accurately depict the various land boundaries, and we can’t afford it.” Wallraff added, “If we have to use our limited funds to buy data rather than purchase open space, the Sierra Club will not be able to be as effective as our donors expect us to be.”

In 2004 the California voters passed Prop. 59, which created a new civil right by adding language to the California Constitution stating that “The people have the right of access to information concerning the conduct of the people’s business,” and that statutes should be narrowly construed if they limit the rights of access. “The Court didn’t follow the California Constitution,” says Sierra Club Attorney Labriola. “The Constitution
required it to interpret the PRA’s definition of software narrowly, since the definition limits access to information. Both the California Attorney General, in his official 2005 opinion on the subject, and the Santa Clara trial court said that parcel map data wasn’t software under the definition in the PRA. But this court opted for a broad interpretation of the definition so that it includes all GIS data.”

According to Wallraff, the most troublesome thing about the Court’s reasoning is that it could easily be expanded. He worries that “this rationale could be used to justify withholding all computer data from public scrutiny. Even though the PRA expressly provides that computer data consisting of public-record information must be disclosed, the software definition is an exception that could eat the rule. If this court can decide that GIS data is software, another court could decide that accounting data is software, or that word processing documents are software. We expect that the Court of Appeal will interpret the statute the same way we do: that ‘software’ means software, not data.”

Newly-formed unincorporated association Berkeley Hillside Preservation filed suit today in the Alameda Superior Court against the City of Berkeley, because it exempted its recent approval of a 10,000 square foot residence and 10-car garage at 2707 Rose Street from mandated environmental review under California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

Wide community opposition arose when the City failed to require any environmental study of geotechnical, historic, aesthetic, and traffic impacts, and refused even to erect story poles as required by its published guidelines.

The City claims ‘categorical exemption’ from environmental review. But the lawsuit points out that exemptions cannot be used when there is any expert opinion that a project may have environmental impacts.

The Preservation group requests issuance of a peremptory writ ordering the City to set aside its approval of the project pending compliance with CEQA. The requested environmental review will consider impacts relating to grading and excavation, demolition, traffic, and aesthetic impacts.

Berkeley Hillside Preservation Group Files Suit to Require Environmental Study of 10,000 Square Foot Structure

From Attorney Susan Brandt-Hawley
Fri May 28 14:04:00 -0700 2010

Co-Petitioner Susan Nunes Fadley said: “We worked arduously on our appeal to the City Council, focussing on issues of process and the unstudied impacts of this project. Now we look to the court to address them.”

Reader Opinion

Below the Radar: HUD Is Trying to Privatize and Mortgage Off All of America’s Public Housing

By George Lakoff
Wed May 26 08:38:00 -0700 2010

The Obama administration’s move to the right is about to give conservatives a victory they could not have anticipated, even under Bush. HUD, under Obama, submitted legislation, called PETRA, to Congress that would result in the privatization of all public housing in America.

The new owners would charge ten percent above market rates to impoverished tenants, money that would be mostly paid by the US government (you and me, the taxpayers). To maintain the property, the new owners would take out a mortgage for building repair and maintenance (like a home equity loan), with no cap on interest rates.

With rents set above market rates, the mortgage risk would be attractive to banks. Either they make a huge profit on the mortgages paid for by the government, or, if the government lowers what it will pay for rents, the property goes into foreclosure. The banks get it and can sell it off to developers.

Sooner or later, the housing budget will be cut back and such foreclosures will happen. The structure of the proposal and the realities of Washington make it a virtual certainty.

The banks and developers make a fortune, with the taxpayers paying for it. The public loses its public housing property. The impoverished tenants lose their apartments, or have their rents go way up if they are forced into the private market. Homelessness increases; government gets smaller.

The banks and developers
win. It is a Bank Bonanza! The poor and the public lose.

And a precedent is set. The government can - privatize any public property: Schools, libraries, national parks, federal buildings - just as has begun to happen in California, where the right-wing governor has started to auction off state property and has even suggested selling off the Supreme Court building.

The rich will get richer; the poor and public get poorer. And the very idea of the public good withers.

This is central to the conservative dream, in which there is no public good - only private goods. And it is a nightmare for democracy.

The irony is that it is happening under the Obama administration. Barack Obama, while running for office, gave perhaps the best and clearest characterization of what democracy is about. Democracy, he has said, is based on empathy - on citizens caring about and for each other. That is why we have principles like freedom and fairness for everyone. It is why social responsibility is necessary. The monstrous alternative is having a society where no one cares about or for anyone else.

HUD, under the Obama administration, is about to take a giant step toward that monstrous society.

Here is a quote from the PETRA bill. It’s intent is to:

provide the opportunity for public housing agencies and private owners to convert from current forms of rental assistance under a variety of programs to long-term, property-based contracts that will enhance market-based discipline and enable owners to sustain operations and leverage private financing to address immediate and long-term capital needs and implement energy-efficiency improvements.

Along the way, tenants’ rights will be trampled, since tenants could not longer seek redress from the government through their public officials - because the government would no longer own the buildings.

Stop PETRA. This is urgent. There is a hearing next Tuesday, May 25, before the House Financial Services Committee and the Subcommittee on Housing, organized by Rep. Maxine Waters. Phone: 202-225-2201. Fax: 202-225-7854.

To write to the committee, go to this web site:
Write to your Congressperson now. If you want to sign a petition, go here. Here is a letter from the National Association of HUD Tenants:

Here is an informational web site, with letters, background information, and alternative proposals:

And do what you can to get the word out. This requires a national discussion.

George Lakoff is Goldman Distinguished Professor of Cognitive Science and Linguistics at the University of California at Berkeley. He is the author of The California Democracy Act, a grassroots California ballot initiative now organizing public support at campaigntrulyrule.com.

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JUNE BALLOT MEASURE ON POOLS (Adapted from Spring NEBA Newsletter Article)

By Barbara Gilbert
Wed May 26 10:38:00 -0700 2010

After months of discussion, two voter surveys, and intense lobbying by pool advocates, the City Council voted to place a $22,500,000 (plus built-in inflator) Community Facilities bond on the June 8, 2010 ballot. This measure requires a 2/3 majority to pass. It would provide for a replacement indoor warm pool of about 2250 square feet and associated facilities constructed at West Campus, to replace the warm pool at the BHS gym scheduled for demolition by BUSD; construct a new all-purpose 25 meter pool and associated facilities at King; and renovate the existing pool and associated facilities at Willard. Over the life of the bond, the average annual tax cost for a 1900 square foot residence is estimated at $70, and at $297 for a 10,000 square foot commercial space. Since the measure includes an unusual levy for ongoing maintenance (ordinarily paid out of the General Fund), after the bond is repaid in 2040 there would remain an annual maintenance tax of $24 for the average homeowner. And as the measure is based on property square footage, these forgoing taxes would be proportionately higher for larger properties.

The NEBA (Northeast Berkeley Association) board met with proponents and opponents, and discussed this measure extensively at its March and April meetings. At this time, the NEBA Board is neither officially opposing or supporting this bond measure. The NEBA board, in general, strongly supports adequate community swim facilities, but nevertheless has reservations about this particular bond measure. NEBA would prefer a smaller, more focused and realistic budget and plan to renovate and maintain those pool facilities that will be widely used by the community, including the King and Willard pools. The threat to close down the Willard pool if the bond measure fails is unconvincing and a form of unacceptable strong-arming.

In particular, the NEBA board has reservations about the proposed construction of a “warm pool” at a construction cost of almost $10,000,000 plus ongoing maintenance costs. “Warm pool” is a misnomer, since the proposed 92 degree fahrenheit temperature is appropriately called a “therapeutic pool” and is, in the vernacular, a “hot pool”. The Aquatic Exercise Association guidelines for pool water temperature indicate that a temperature of 90 degrees and above is only suitable for certain limited types of therapy and rehabilitation, and for Parkinson’s Disease. A lower temperature is recommended for most other potential users of a warmer-than-normal pool, such as pregnant women, older adults, the obese, the arthritic, and those with multiple sclerosis. It appears that there are only about 100 Berkeley users of the existing therapeutic pool at Berkeley High School. A new therapeutic hot pool would thus serve very few Berkeleyans and at most a few hundred regional users--without regional financial contribution. Current user fees are subsidized by about $20 per swim and there has been no effort to explore higher user fees for those who can afford it or who can get health insurance reimbursement, or for non-Berkeleyans. In any event, a direct subsidy to all current users for use elsewhere would be minuscule compared to the bond cost. The YMCA has two therapeutic pools and there are other possible resources at UCB.

The NEBA board also feels that the size and timing of this bond measure is inappropriate given the City’s overall unfunded long-term liabilities in the hundred of millions of dollars (yet to be fully accounted for as promised), its $16+ million annual operating deficit, the shockingly poor state of the local and national economy, and BUSD plans to float a new $200M+ facilities bond in November 2010. The NEBA board was unhappy with the BUSD decision to tear down the existing therapeutic pool at BHS and hopes BUSD will reconsider so that this pool may be renovated. The board also frowned upon the unorthodox use of bond money for staff and maintenance functions ordinarily paid by the City’s General Fund, and the floating of yet another revenue measure that is purported to benefit the en-
tire community but is only to be paid for by property owners.

In summary, in the foreseeable future NEBA would like to see a better and smaller plan for our community pools that does not include a $10,000,000+ therapy pool for the benefit of a few hundred persons at most. The NEBA Board understands that some voters will support this particular pool bond measure in the belief that it is right for Berkeley or that the good parts outweigh the rest. The NEBA board urges voters to proceed with caution and care.

For your information, below is a summary of the official ballot arguments for and against the measure:

For: municipal pools are a treasure but all four are near the end of their useful lives; there's no time to lose; all pools will become more energy efficient; operating funds will be guaranteed; supporting this measure will result in a legacy for Berkeley.

Against: Berkeley already has 15 pools, 9 public, 3 nonprofit, and 3 private; warm pool users can be provided with passes to the YMCA and Cal Stars pools; new regional facilities should be regionally funded; BUSD should not be demolishing the warm pool at BHS and it could be rehabilitated for 1/3 the cost; all BUSD pools should be available to the general community as in other jurisdictions; Berkeley finances are already stretched too thin, more taxes and fees are impending, and essential needs have not been established or prioritized.

Rebuttal to the Argument For: according to the Aquatic Exercise Association, the Cal and YMCA pools should meet the needs of nearly all warm pool swimmers, and membership costs would be minuscule compared to this measure; the proposed 91F temperature of the new warm pool is 3.5 feet deep, too shallow for most adults, which is already full capacity; it also has one 86-degree pool, too cold for many elderly and disabled, which is at full capacity in most time periods. UC Berkeley has no warm pool.

The Warm Pool's 92-degree water temperature is dangerously hot for most users and is only suitable for a tiny minority.

Warm pools around the Bay Area are 92 degrees and have a wide range of programming for all ages, including early swim instruction for children. Examples include the Betty Wright Center in Palo Alto and the Timpany Center in San Jose.

Instead of building new pools, the existing pools should be rehabilitated, which would be greener and cheaper.

The decision by the School Board to remove the Warm Pool from the High School campus was unanimous and is irreversible. Therefore there is no Warm Pool to rehab. Measure C would rehab Willard and West Campus outdoor pools, and would rehab and expand King Pool.

The Barracudas youth team and Masters teams do not need a municipal pool because they could train and compete at the Berkeley High School competition pool.

The High School pool is occupied by High School teams during weekday hours, and it has no capacity for use by non-students.

Another pools ballot measure can be tried in a year or two from now. There's no hurry.

The Warm Pool and Willard Pool are slated for permanent closure in the next year if Measure C is not approved, and citywide budget cuts will endanger programming, hours and maintenance at the remaining two pools. Measure C is the culmination of years of exhaustive public process about the pools, and it is virtually impossible to start again from scratch.

Measure C would increase pool maintenance costs by $3.5 million per year, adjusted for inflation.

Measure C provides $980,000 annually for programs, staffing, hours and maintenance, adjusted for inflation, largely to offset projected budget cuts. Measure C's total expenditure by 2040 is capped at $3.5 million, most of which is the normal repayment of bond principal and interest.

Funds are likely to be siphoned off to the rest of the city budget and not spent on the pools.

Measure C funds must be used exclusively for the purposes described in the ballot statement - for repair and rebuilding of the pools, and program and operating costs. Any use of the funds for non-pools purposes would be illegal.

Berkeley's debt is skyrocketing and it cannot afford more.

Despite the budget crisis, the city's finances are in solid shape. By law, the city must run a balanced budget, and its projected deficit is being closed with budget cuts. Berkeley has an AA+ bond rating from Standard and Poors, in the top 1 percent of all cities nationwide.

Measure C's Mello-Roos financing structure is unusual and risky.

Mello-Roos Community Facilities Districts (CFDs) have been used by hundreds of California cities and school districts for new facilities and programs. Berkeley's Mello-Roos CFD #1 was created by voters in 2000 to pay for earthquake preparedness equipment purchases by the fire and police departments. Measure C would create Mello-Roos CFD #2.

Measure C borrows money for operating expenses. This is irresponsible budgeting.
Measure C has two halves - the bond measure for capital costs, and an annual tax for pools operations to guarantee the pools’ hours and programs despite the budget crisis. No bond funds can be spent on operations.

The $22.6 million cost is way too high. More competitive bidding could save millions.

The $22.6 million cost was calculated by Cummings Corp., a well-respected project management company. As the city does with all bond projects, it will put Measure C projects out to fully competitive public bid.

Measure C would pay $40 million in interest to financiers. This is too high. Total interest payments are projected at $17.6 million over 30 years.

Berkeley’s tax burden is much higher than any other city locally.

In February 2008, the City Manager conducted a detailed study of the property tax burden in Berkeley, Oakland and Albany. It found Berkeley’s taxes were above Oakland’s but below Albany’s. Since then, Albany’s tax increases have outpaced Berkeley’s.

For more Q&A, please see the Frequently Asked Questions list on the Measure C campaign website: www.berkeleypools.org/faq.html.

Robert Collier is a co-chair of the Yes on Measure C campaign. See www.berkeleypools.org and www.facebook.com/berkeleypools.

BOND ISSUES: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Barbara & Henrik Bull

Mon May 31 22:37:00 -0700 2010

When you are looking at your June ballot pamphlet, it might be a good idea to look into the future as well as the past.

Looking to the future, in November there will be a bond issue of over $200 million that will include new classrooms and a new gymnasium at Berkeley High School at the site of the existing landmarked Old Gym.

Looking back to 2000, Berkeley voters passed Measure AA, a bond issue for $116.5 million which focused on building new classrooms at Berkeley High. That money was spent for a variety of purposes, but no new classrooms were built. There was a need for classrooms in 2000 and there is perhaps a greater need now.

The BUSD testified against granting landmark status to the old gymnasium building, saying that they were not bound by the restrictions that landmark status would impose on a private building owner. The Berkeley Landmarks Commission voted to landmark the Old Gym in 2008.

The BUSD proceeded to hire architects to design a new classroom building at the site of the Old Gym and warm water pool. The architects were not told to study whether the proposed classrooms and gymnasium could be accommodated within the existing building. Little known to Berkeley citizens, the architects were assigned to design a new bleacher/stadium with 2200 seats estimated to cost $10.4 million. This would be built before the classroom/gym building!

In a city which prides itself on being “green”, BUSD seems to ignore the fact that the greenest building is one which already exists. On average, it takes 40-50 years to regain the energy wasted when a building is demolished.

Concerned about the decision to demolish the Old Gym, a group of 22 volunteers, mostly design professionals, met at Berkeley High in 2008 to study the feasibility of accommodating the BUSD’s program within the Old Gym. They met for one morning. Many interesting ideas were generated in this brief study session and a report was presented to the BUSD. The were not interested.

Being a member of the study group, I felt that a single unified plan should be developed. As a retired architect, I had time to pursue this task. I was pleased to find that the existing Old Gym could comfortably accommodate 18 classrooms rather than the BUSD program for 15 classrooms. Most would have lofty ceilings and high windows. The existing warm water pool, which was recently upgraded by the City of Berkeley, would be retained. Based on the cost of the recent work at the Richmond Plunge, the total cost for renovating the pool and locker room would be within the $3 million which the voters approved for this purpose in 2000! This contrasts with about $10 million for a newwarm water pool in the current Measure C ballot.

Why not keep the existing warm water pool and not spend $10 million (of the $22.5 million measure C money) on a new facility? Why not renovate the Landmarked Old Gym to provide the needed classrooms and gymnasium? Is a new stadium with 2200 seats the highest priority for Berkeley High?

You can view the architect’s plans for BUSD’s proposed buildings at: www.baker-vilar.com.

Click on educational, Berkeley High School South of Bancroft.

Henrik Bull, FAIA

May 12, 2010

Remembering Rachel Corrie

Ralph E. Stone

Tue Jun 01 11:36:00 -0700 2010

The MV Rachel Corrie is one of the ships in the international aid Gaza Freedom Flotilla that was attacked by Israeli naval forces on May 31, 2010. Remember Rachel Corrie, the 22-year old peace activist from Washington State, who attempted to stop a bulldozer operated by the Israeli military from demolishing homes and other buildings in Gaza. Rachel was struck and killed. Some witnesses claimed she was struck deliberately, but an Israeli inquiry found her death to be an accident.

At last year’s San Francisco Jewish Film Festival, I saw “Rachel,” a documentary about the 2003 incident. The film depicts the circumstances surrounding her death. The documentary is not just about Corrie’s death. It is also about activists who fight injustice without hope of winning, but do so without despair.

The film is also about the ongoing conflict in Gaza, which stretches back to the creation of Israel in 1947. Then, the United Nations partitioned the land, allotting the Jews 55 percent of Palestine. The Arabs did not agree to this partition. In the 1948 “war of independence” (called the “El Naqu’a,” the catastrophe, by the Arabs), Israel ended up with 78 percent of the area of Palestine. This war displaced 750,000 Palestinians and over 450 Arab villages were erased. In the war of 1967, the remaining Palestinian territory was captured by Israel. Out of this captured land, Israel created the West Bank and the Gaza Strip by chopping up the land into isolated enclaves surrounded by Jewish settlements and Israeli occupation forces. The Palestinians lost 78 percent of their land to Israel and are left with 22 percent. Recently, Israel has erected a wall or fence, which cuts deep into Palestinian territory, joining large Jewish settlement blocks to Israel, further confining the Palestinians to isolated enclaves. Israel continues to establish new settlements...
I applaud the recent U.S. House of Representative vote to repeal of the 1993 “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy that allows homosexuals to serve in the military only if they don’t disclose their sexual orientation. The House vote came after a similar vote in the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee. I object, however, that the repeal, if passed, will not be immediate. Rather repeal will go into effect only after the $5 million Pentagon study is received on December 1 and after the President, the Secretary of Defense, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff certify that the repeal. I only wish President Obama had fulfilled his campaign pledge by repealing the policy by executive order after becoming president.

What happens if the study recommends against repeal?

What’s to certify and study anyway? Consider there are about 30 countries in the world, including nearly all of the NATO members, as well as South Africa, Brazil, and the Philippines that allow homosexuals to serve openly in the military. And on May 16, 2010, representatives from Great Britain, Canada, Australia, Israel, and the Netherlands met at the Brookings Institute to discuss how the militaries in those countries handled allowing gays and lesbians to serve in their militaries. The consensus was that, in spite of concerns before the change, when gays and lesbians were allowed to serve, it was a non-issue.

In 2000, Aaron Belkin, a political science professor at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and Melissa Sheridan Emser-Herbert, a veteran of the U.S. Army and Army Reserve, and Professor and Chair, Department of Sociology at Hamline University in Saint Paul, Minnesota, co-authored an exhaustive 44-page study on Canada, which, after a series of lawsuits in 1991, changed its policies to allow gays to openly serve in the military. The study, which at the time was regarded as the most comprehensive academic study of homosexuality in a foreign military ever completed, concluded that the change in policy had “not led to any change in military performance, unit cohesion, or discipline.”

A recent poll showed that 75 percent of Americans support openly gay people serving in the U.S. military.

Then why a study? Probably because Congressional leaders and the White House are trying to appease homophobic Congresspersons who will ultimately oppose the repeal anyway.

Repeal “don’t ask, don’t tell” immediately. It is the right thing to do.

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**Time for Immediate Repeal of Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell Military Policy**

*By Ralph E. Stone*

*Tue Jun 01 11:47:00 -0700 2010*

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In the June 8 election, Berkeley has the choice of deciding whether to embrace all our city’s residents - old as well as young, disabled as well as able-bodied - or whether to succumb to conservative wedge-issue tactics that seek to divide us.

Measure C will benefit all pool users in Berkeley, from the Barracudas youth team to young parents to neighborhood lap swimmers. But no one has higher stakes than the users of the Warm Pool. For us, it literally is our lifestyle.

Several of the writers of this article are disabled, and all of us need the Warm Pool’s 92-degree deep water to allow us to get exercise and gain the mobility that we don’t have on dry land.

For Daily Planet readers who are able-bodied, it may be difficult to realize just how much a municipal pool can change someone’s life. But please understand that once in water - warm water, mind you, not just regular pool water - our battered bodies transform into new, mobile forms. It is physically, mentally and spiritually rejuvenating.

We urge you to watch the Measure C campaign’s video, which is about all the city’s four pools but includes a very nice segment on the Warm Pool. The video is 10 minutes long, and we guarantee it will surprise you. It may even move you to tears - as it did for many of us as we watched the footage of the Parent-Tot class, or the class for Special Needs children. Please see the “media” section of the Measure C campaign website, www.berkeleypools.org.

In 2011, the Warm Pool will lose its longtime home at the Old Gym at Berkeley High School, so the pool must be rebuilt at a separate location. Measure C provides a new home at West Campus, the site of the former Berkeley Adult School at Addison and Browning streets. For all of Berkeley, the rebuilt indoor Warm Pool will be a wonderful complement to the three outdoor pools at King, Willard and West Campus. And for West Berkeley neighborhoods, the Warm Pool will be a huge bonus - it will be operated year-round and will be a perfect place for parents with toddlers and young children during the cold-weather months when the West Campus outdoor pool is closed for the
season.

For all these reasons, Measure C is supported by every single elected official in Berkeley - the unanimous City Council, School Board and Rent Board, plus former Mayor Shirley Dean, State Senator Loni Hancock, and a wide variety of community groups.

Unfortunately, Berkeley’s anti-tax conservatives are cynically trying to use the Warm Pool as a wedge issue against Measure C. Led by Marie Bowman, who seems to be positioning herself as a Berkeley hybrid of Sarah Palin and Howard Jarvis, they are making a series of wild and false claims that the Warm Pool is unnecessary and too expensive.

It’s a fact-free zone. For example, they claim that the Warm Pool is Olympic size. In fact, it is only one-sixth of Olympic size. They claim that the UC Berkeley campus has a Warm Pool that could be an alternative for city residents. In fact, no such pool exists.

Most absurdly, they claim that the Warm Pool’s 92-degree water is unhealthy for tots, children, the pregnant, arthritic, seniors and the obese. This claim is directly contradicted by aquatics facilities in the Bay Area and around the nation. The Berkeley Pools Task Force, which was convened by the City Council and School Board in 2008-2009, closely examined aquatics industry standards and guidelines for the Warm Pool, and finally recommended a 92-degree temperature.

The Bay Area’s two largest warm pools -- the Betty Wright Swim Center in Palo Alto and the Timpany Center in San Jose -- are 93 degrees and 92 degrees, respectively, and offer a wide variety of programming, from early swim classes for all ages to programs for the elderly and disabled. The Downtown Berkeley YMCA holds all its parent-child swim lessons at its pool, which is too small for most adults and many children, however. The American Swim Academy has four 92-degree pools in Fremont, Newark, Livermore and Dublin, which offer a wide variety of swim classes for toddlers and children.

Our opponents also claim that the Warm Pool does not need to be rebuilt because it could be retained and remodeled ("a greener alternative") at Berkeley High School. But the School Board has decided unanimously that the Warm Pool must be removed from the High School to relieve the severe overcrowding on campus. This decision is wildly popular among Berkeley parents and students, and it is essentially irreversible. By pretending otherwise, our opponents are just trying to create animosity between Warm Pool users and school supporters. These wedge tactics do not change the fact that if Measure C is not approved, Berkeley will have no Warm Pool, period.

But our opponents will stop at nothing. As a cover for the anti-Measure C campaign, Marie Bowman even has violated our privacy by launching a pseudo-Warm Pool website, BerkeleyWarmPool.org, showing photos of many Warm Pool users without their permission. Several of us have written Marie, who is owner of the website, to demand that she remove our photos, but she has not responded.

But this is par for the course. The anti-Measure C campaign is a callous effort by conservatives who would deprive our community of the pools we need to survive and would try to drive wedges between Berkeley residents.

Berkeley deserves much better. Let’s save our pools, protect our health, preserve our quality of life, and unite our community. Please vote “Yes” for Measure C!

The authors are Berkeley residents and users of the Warm Pool

**Measure C Cartoon**

*Justin Lee*

*Tue Jun 01 15:02:00 -0700 2010*

I watched the news today, oh boy! Channel 7 at 11 flashed back to Air Force One as it touched down at SFO in a light drizzle. From there, a caravan of stretch limos black as polished coffins carried the lucky man who made the grade through barricaded streets to a Nob Hill fundraiser for Senator Boxer. Hundreds of fans paid dearly to see and hear the lucky man press flesh and crack jokes in the Fairmont Hotel’s Edwardian opulence. The limos soon departed for an even more sybaritic reception at the Getty mansions on Pacific Heights’ Gold Coast. Yes, that’s Getty, as in Getty Oil.

It’s Day 35 of the worst environmental disaster in U.S. history and President Obama is clearly having the time of his life. The Huffington Post ran photos last week of a state dinner the Obamas hosted for our neighbors from across the dying Gulf of Mexico, the Calderons. Michelle and Barack moved facilely through backdrops resembling the Hapsburgs’ Schönbrunn Palace in Vienna early in 1914.

Unlike his immediate predecessor in the White House, Obama is comfortable in his skin and behind the shield of his dazzling smile. The audience ate up his rock star celebrity as — 2000 miles away and a mile closer to Hell — a submarine Chernobyl daily vomited an uncontrolled cloud of emulsified death inexorably curling southeast to where the Gulf Stream will hook and convey it round the world. More effectively than the atmospheric cloud from a burning Soviet reactor, the plume will kill everything that comes in contact with it. The teeming rookeries of pelicans and herons, the clams, oysters, shrimp, and crabs near the shore and the fishermen who depend on them, they are already doomed. Unless you have some shrimp in the freezer, kiss your jambalaya goodbye.

Obama has not found time in his busy schedule yet to visit the Gulf, but he has sent members of his dream team down there to demonstrate a recklessness matched only by their deference to the private sector. As with the gang Obama assembled to run the nation’s finances, he has left it to the very industry that caused the calamity to stop and remediate it, warning BP for the cameras that he will hold the company responsible for a cleanup even he must know is impossible. That is apparently all that the public will get from an administration that has as little intention of serving its interest as the previous one. So far, a radiant smile has cov-
The $11.1 Water Bond Proposition now on the November ballot would pay for the overhaul of California’s aging and overburdened water system. If passed by the voters, the bond will ultimately cost taxpayers $22 billion when interest is included. Putting aside the merits or demerits of the bond measure, can California, now in a budget crisis, afford it.

How bad is the problem? Governor Schwarzenegger says California’s budget deficit will reach $41.8 billion by the budget year ending in June 2010. This probably means more deep cuts in education, health, social services, corrections, and transportation. California owes $8.8 billion in short-term loans that have to be paid off by June and over $120 billion in outstanding bonds and interest that will be paid over decades. The state’s pension fund, CalPers, has $16.3 billion more in liabilities than assets plus California faces a $51.8 billion for the health and dental benefits of state retirees and future retirees.

California now has the lowest credit rating of any state in the nation, just above junk bond status. One major problem is the rise in California’s debt-service ratio (DSR). That is, the ratio of annual general fund debt–service costs to annual general fund revenues and transfers. This is often used as one indicator of the state’s debt burden. The higher it is and more rapidly it rises, the more closely bond raters, financial analysts, and investors tend to look at the state’s debt practices, and the more debt–service expenses limit the use of revenues for other programs. According to the California Legislative Analyst’s Office, debt servicing is projected to comprise 9 percent of general fund revenues by the end of 2014-15.

The over 9 percent DSR is considerably higher than it has been in the past. In part, this reflects the sharp, recent fall–off in general fund revenues, which drives up the ratio for a given level of debt service. To the extent additional bonds are authorized and sold in future years beyond those already approved, the states debt–service costs and DSR will be higher. As of October 30, 2009, the LAO reports that California has $66.5 billion of outstanding general fund debt and over $64 billion of authorized, but unissued general fund bonds.

Also please note that groups like the Sierra Club, Clean Water Action, Environmental Justice Coalition on Water and Food, and Water Watch among others, oppose the Water Bond Proposition because it is also bad water policy.

Until California’s fiscal house is put in order or at least a fiscally-sound budget passes, the prudent course may be to avoid taking on new debt, even for ostensibly worthwhile projects such as the $11.1 billion Water Bond Proposition. Voters should keep this in mind when considering whether to vote for the Water Bond Proposition (2010) this November.

**Wetlands Versus Human Ignorance**

*By Jack Bragen*

*Sun May 30 15:35:00 -0700 2010*

My wife and I used to ride Amtrak between Martinez and Klamath Falls a couple of times a year to visit relatives. Amtrak dubbed this train route, “The Coast Starlight.” I would recommend this train to my worst enemy.

The train would often stop for several hours at a time as it waited for tracks to become available. Amtrak has a lower priority than freight trains in this area. One time we were delayed on this train for approximately twelve hours. I could complain much more, but it is off subject.

On one trip, as the train was traveling over a wide expanse of marsh, the train engineer over the loudspeakers explained to us the significance of the wetlands that exist here in the San Francisco Bay Area. These wetlands are the biggest that exist anywhere on the planet. They play an extremely important role in the ecosystem that supports life on Earth. They are host to thousands upon thousands of species including insects, amphibians, reptiles, birds, fish and mammals. Without these wetlands, the ecosystems on the Earth could go into a tailspin, one in which massive amounts of life everywhere would perish.

The destruction of the Marsh in Florida due to petroleum is an extremely significant development on multiple levels. We will not know the full effects on the biosphere of the Earth until several decades have passed. The fact that the seafood industry will be devastated, as well as the tourist industry in that area, coupled with the reduction in offshore drilling that ought to take place, will be another blow to the economy.

The change in our environmental system that will take place, as a domino effect on the environment, could become as massive as the one that led to the extinction of the dinosaurs.

The wetlands in the Bay Area are similarly important to our existence and are similarly vulnerable to the effects of a petroleum accident. We must not jeopardize the west coast with more offshore drilling.

In the 1970’s, Charleton Heston starred in a movie called, “Soylent Green.” The movie was roughly based on a short story by
science fiction author Harry Harrison. The scenario of the movie included global warming, and was about an extremely overpopulated Earth in which people fought for basic necessities such as food and water, as well as a place to sleep.

At the end of this movie it turns out that the ocean is dying due to overharvesting and overpolluting. This is a doomsday scenario since the plankton in the ocean provides about eighty percent of the breathable oxygen in our air.

I believe that this oil slick is bad enough to bring about such a doomsday scenario. The quantity that seems to be spewing upward based on the reports that I’ve seen might mean that if this leak isn’t soon halted, it could contaminate the entire ocean. And that, my friends, will spell the end of us.

Our politicians ought to realize that the life their saving by addressing this problem could be their own.

Troubling Autism News

Nathan Pitts, Autism Spectrum Liberation Front
Tue Jun 01 16:16:00 -0700 2010

There were three troubling news items this past two weeks relating to Autism. Two relate to police violence, and the third sadly involves Hershey’s Foods Corporation.

Thirteen year-old Kaaron Guillory was pepper-sprayed by a Sacramento police sergeant on school property. He now faces felony charges of assaulting the sergeant and resisting arrest. Mr. Guillory is autistic, and was regularly harassed by bullies while attending Rosa Parks Middle School. He had only been attending the school for two months, yet due to the indifference of school officials, and actions of the police officer, the student’s mother decided homeschooling would be the safest option for him. A bully had initiated a fight with Kaaron Guillory, and a police officer forcefully intervened. The police sergeant was not reading the cues exhibited by the teenager’s autistic response to the situation. The sergeant made the teenager more confused and agitated, instead of making attempts to calm the student down. Kaaron became so upset that he smashed his hand into a window, which, when pushed to the limit, is not an uncommon way for an autistic person to express an extremely high level of frustration and confusion. A spokesperson for the police department said that pepper-spraying someone they know is a special needs student is within police guidelines. The sergeant involved claimed that student assaulted him, and that he was unable to subdue and handcuff the 13 year-old special needs student without the aid of pepper-spray. Belinda Torres, Kaaron’s mother, said that her son was “disoriented at the scene, and at the hospital he kept saying, ‘Mom, what happened?’ He didn’t understand as well.” She also stated that her son has become “more withdrawn”.

From the beginning, Belinda Torres had tried to communicate her son’s disability to the school; she explained that there were issues of bullying and that her son needed to be safe while attending school. For two months, nobody at the junior high did anything to help Kaaron Guillory acclimate to his new school. Then when a fight breaks out, Kaaron ends up being labeled a criminal, instead of being treated as a victim. Autistics who are able to pursue a public education, must be able to do so in safe and tolerant environments. Autistics must also be free of police aggression. If the sergeant had better training in how to interact with Autistics, he could have deescalated the situation instead of making it worse. There is an underlying prejudice in police culture against citizens with certain types of disabilities. Police are trained to view people with social disabilities as dangerous. There also needs to be more restrictions on weapons like pepper-spray and tasers, especially in situations such as this when an officer knows an individual is disabled.

Over in Georgia, Clifford Grevenberg, an 18 year-old Autistic was tased twice by police officer while waiting outside a restaurant. Clifford’s older brother was inside the restaurant ordering food. Two Tyree Island police officers wrongly believed the teenager was drunk, because he was sitting on the sidewalk and had a “fixed gaze” when spoken to. The officers told Clifford to stand up and demanded to see ID, while they grabbed his arms. After the Autistic failed to respond, they pushed him down, breaking a tooth. Then Clifford was tased twice. Clifford faces charges this July. Eye witness accounts say that at no time did Clifford fight with the police or try to run away. Police Chief James Price blamed the Grevenberg family in the press, saying that Clifford should not have been “left unattended”.

Dover, Delaware was the location of the NASCAR Autism Speaks 400. The race is named after Autism Speaks, an organization which considers Autistic disorders to be diseases which need to be cured, and eradicated. A division inside the organization is called Cure Now. Autism Speaks had an ad campaign which insisted that Autistic children caused chaos in families and were burdens on parents. Furthermore, Autism Speaks perpetuated the dangerous myth that common childhood vaccinations were causing Autism. Autism Speaks threatened legal action against a 14 year-old Autistic girl for making a website which parodied the organization. As well they threatened suit against another Autistic individual for selling t-shirts which read: “Autism Speaks can go away. I have Autism, I can speak for myself.”

Sadly, Hershey’s Foods Corporation was a major sponsor of the NASCAR Autism Speaks 400. As an Autistic person, I am intrigued by things going around in circles, but NASCAR is insipid, and represents the antithesis of conservation. And Hershey’s didn’t just associate itself with any race, it associated itself with a race co-organized by a pseudo-science organization reminiscent of X-Men villains that try to vanquish the “mutant menace”.

Autistic adults have a lower quality of life, on average, than people who are neurotypical. Unfortunately, the patterns of ignorance and abuse towards Autistics are being repeated on autistic youth.

Letters to the Editor

Save Our Pools-Vote No on Measure C; No on C; Measure C: No; Charity; City Employee Pay and Pools; Election Stolen; Loving the Berkeley Rep; No More War! Tea; Afghan Women; Republican Fearmongering; Thanks; Democracy and Education

Save Our Pools-Vote No on Measure C

The “Save Our Pools” on blue and white posters dotting the city imply that supporting Measure C, a $22.5 million bond measure on the June 8th ballot, is the only way. It is not and our well-meaning swim-community has been duped. Berkeley citizens overwhelmingly support pools and swim and learn-to-swim, and senior swim and Barracuda swim programs, and will continue to do so, yet we should all strongly reject the fatally-flawed Measure C.

Consider these facts:

(1)$10 million, or nearly 1/2 of this bond measure is ear-marked to build a new, city-owned therapeutic pool. The current and decrepit warm pool facility is leased from BUSD, not owned by the City. That is fortunate because over the years the drain on our
General Fund to maintain these rented premises has been costly, exorbitantly so considering that only about 100 Berkeley residents use it. We should be grateful that BUSD has chosen to take it back. Instead, this measure proposes to spend over $100,000 per current user of taxpayer’s harder-than-ever-to-come-by dollars on a white-elephant facility to serve 0.01% of our population.

(2) There are two therapeutic pools at the YMCA and other possible resources at UCB. Thus warm-pool users can be entirely accommodated without a new pool. In fact, because of council-approved taxpayer-fronted subsidies to the YMCA, all 1,600 + city employees have free membership to the Y. Revolve that “perk” and 1,600+ therapeutic pool users could be accommodated at zero cost or indebtedness to Berkeley taxpayers.

(3) Measure C also includes a Trojan-horse, a $3.5 million component for “maintenance”, inflated annually. Ordinarily this is a General Fund expenditure. For the city manager and council to foist off these expenditures as a special tax on business and home property owners is unprecedented and devious. Even worse, unlike the ill-conceived construction portions of this measure, this levy on taxpayers does not expire after 30 years, but is an ever-increasing tax in perpetuity. Berkeley citizens will vigorously support pool programs and the revitalization of the pools we have, perhaps by a new bond measure presented in November, but the June 8th Measure C is definitely a NO-NO!

Victoria Peirotes

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No on C

On June 8th Berkeley voters will have a chance to vote on Measure C. It proposes a $22.5 million dollar 30 year bond, and a maintenance component in perpetuity in the amount of 3.5 million dollars.

This latter figure would be part of your “special taxes” forever and indexed for inflation.

The bond is earmarked for the construction of a new pool and the replacement of three others.

At the May 26 NEBA membership meeting, where this Measure was being debated, an audience member characterized the “maintenance” component as a Trojan Horse.

The current pools maintenance budget is almost one million dollars and the Council, when writing the measure, loaded an additional 2.5 million (the Trojan Horse). I suspect the Council wants to use this to partially make up for present and future deficits (four million this year, 16.5 million for 2011). It indicates that our city is not up to the task to reduce the out of control spending and are using kids and the elderly as a front to raise money. They are afraid to confront the powerful unions representing overpaid and overcompensated municipal employees.

This is the same Council who raised our refuse fee via the “protest” vote. This undemocratic move worked as follows: they sent Berkeley property owners a letter for them to respond on whether the City should raise the refuse fee 30%. Not responding was considered a yes vote. Imagine a ballot where a candidate is running for office and if you stayed home it would be construed as your voting for said candidate. Outrageous.

I recently helped a friend in Ukiah remove some trash from his property in Ukiah. We drove the laden truck to the transfer station and it cost a mere fourteen dollars. I told my friend that Berkeley would have charged over $60. Given that both cities use the same process of carting refuse to a faraway landfill, what does Berkeley do with the $46 overcharge?

See the pattern? On June 8th send this council a message and vote no on Measure C.

Robert Cabrera

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Measure C: No

Kudos for publishing opinions by Barbara Gilbert and Shirley Dean in the May 20 issue. While at first blush the two pieces seem to clash, they are really two sides of the same coin.

Gilbert’s far-ranging essay takes us from trash collection to animal shelters and public pensions, uniting these disparate elements in a compelling picture of the self-inflicted wounds bleeding red ink from Berkeley’s budget.

Dean writes in favor of Measure C (thus far supported by wobbly arguments, the usual politicians, and the cheering special interest group that crafted it). She informs us that the Mayor and School Board are against rehabilitating the current warm water pool. Yet Dean herself says rehabbing would have been better than the expensive new construction proposed by Measure C. And she’s right about that: not only does rehab reduce costs by 2/3, it produces less landfill, uses less energy, and has a smaller carbon footprint. Acclaimed architect Henrik Bull has shown the School Board’s desire for classrooms can be met by rehabbing the landmarked gymnasium building, again saving the environment and the checkbook simultaneously.

Dean says the wrongheadedness of our public servants must be accepted as a given. If we don’t agree to higher taxes and do what they want, they’ll take away our pools! Some would call this cravenly rewarding bad behavior and encouraging more of the same. Measure C supporters console themselves with self-congratulation: our values are wonderful! Discussion of the actual ballot measure is unworthy by comparison.

On the one hand, we have public officials doing the wrong thing and not being held accountable. On the other, voters putting themselves on the back in order to avoid dealing with the financial consequences of their votes. Gilbert could hardly have asked for a better illustration of her argument than Dean unwittingly provides.

Robert Baum

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Charity

Dorothy Snodgrass, you are either incredibly naive or, God forbid, not very smart. The “forlorn” woman counting her bounty at Starbucks would not be there were it not for you and others who feel pity for her. If she is one of “God’s forsaken creatures”, it is because she chooses to be there. Yes, she may be mentally ill, and that is a tragic problem. But there are no lack of food and other services in Berkeley and the greater Bay Area. Why do you think so many homeless, or people such as this woman are here? Not because they want to take advantage of the cultural diversity and community available here. They come because people such as yourself support them while they shout and scream at people passing by and otherwise behave as malignant growths on downtown Berkeley and other areas. I have been spit on, screamed at and shoved by these people. Pity? I don’t think so. They are not hungry. They are beggars, some are sick, many have chosen this lifestyle for reasons incomprehensible to many, myself included. Please don’t enable them to continue littering the streets of Berkeley with your “generosity”.

Susan Sholin

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City Employee Pay and Pools

Going back in time to around 2007, the City of Berkeley had well over 350 employees that made over 100,000 dollars. You know it’s higher now! If you review this site:

You will be shocked to see the largesse bestowed upon the myriad of workers and it’s amazing that a majority of these non-
professionals rake in 120-150 thousand a year. Plus $200,000 for Mayor Tom Bates' buddy, the City Manager Phillip Kamlarz. Every person in Berkeley pays him $2 dollars for his “wizardry” and today we see the magical results of his handiwork - a 144 million dollar budget HOLE. The excessive pay, pension liabilities and per capita employee-per-resident statistics are enormous.

It’s remarkable that the Mayor, city workers and machine politico hacks like former mayors Dean and Hancock still try to squeeze the dead middle class taxpayer with over-the-top bonds and parcel taxes like Measure C. They want this measure so badly, they will resort to no end to get the bond money.

The City is near a 14+ million budget deficit or MORE.

The Pool Bond would raise 23 million in instant bond money to go to the “pools.”

If the City builds the pools at a cost similar to Orinda or other cities’ pools, each pool would cost 2 million not the requested 5.5 million.

There would be leftover money of 3.5 million per pool or $14 million dollars left over if construction is bid at market rates.

Add in the 3.5 million in parcel taxes to begin paying off the 30 year bond and paying the maintenance (will it really cost that much?)

The City could have near 17 million in leftover money to “do with it what they may” which is probably plug up the budget gap and keep paying those hefty 150,000 dollar salaries.

The City can legally get MORE than 3.5 million from the square-footage rate.

Moral Hazard is abound as the City slews off millions in interest payments to the suckers (homeowners and businesses) and the City kicks the can down the road.

Mayor Bates jumping in the pool just isn’t enough. If city employees are part of the “team” they should take a salary haircut and donate some of that absurd money to the pool cause and keep the city solvent. Do you believe in miracles or the predictable entitlement greed of the government class? The bond needs to be cut at least in half, and the parcel tax is 50% too expensive as written.

Justin Lee

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Election Stolen

After all the anomalous election results-votes shifted from polls and exit polls always in the same direction - one must be in complete denial to think that our elections have not been compromised. The Conyers committee report amply illustrated how the presidential election of 2004 was stolen in Ohio. The circumstances of the 2002 HAVA act should give any legislator some pause. Why did Abramoff’s firm (fueled by Diebold’s contribution) lobby for this bill which facilitated the takeover of most of our elections by eminently hackable voting machines? It’s all amply documented if we have the courage (or good sense) to open our eyes. If we are to remain a democracy, we must take action. The Holt bill could be a start. We dodged the bullet with the Obama election, but the grave threat of election theft is still there.

Dr. Harold Lecar

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Loving the Berkeley Rep

I couldn’t disagree more with Ms. O’Malley’s description of the Berkeley Rep as a “downtown pre-Broadway tryout house with a bridge-and-tunnel audience”. Wow. I “walked” to American Idiot (the Green Day-based rock play) and it was AWESOME. The lush, layered arrangements were really stunning. And yes, it went on to Broadway to rave reviews - and this is a great thing! To dismiss the Rep as a “tryout house” - really, wow. It craps all over one of their greatest achievements which they somehow managed to pull off in budget-cutting, payroll-reducing, nail-biting times. I also recently saw “Girlfriend” - a gay coming-of-age story and happened to sit next to the choreographer of the show, which was a real treat. Some of my friends said it was short on plot, didn’t have a central conflict, etc., but I also thought this little definitely-not-for-Broadway play was terrific. It captured the hopefulness and hesitancy of teenagers in love and I have to say that it really moved this middle-aged gay guy. To Susie and Tony and all the folks at the Rep - thank you for all you have brought to this city and what you have brought to my heart. May our wonderful, walkable, home-grown theater live on forever.

George Beier

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No More War!

We now have one trillion reasons to oppose the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. On May 30, those two wars will have cost $1 trillion for operations alone, not even counting the interest on the debt of that borrowed money or the health care costs for returning vets. It is an amount so incomprehensible that it can only be understood in terms of what it could have bought rather than missiles and destruction. For $1 trillion we could immediately give every one of the 15.4 million unemployed people in the United States a $50,000 job and still have $235 billion left over. We could provide free public university education for the next 24 years to the 2 million of our children who typically enter college annually. And those are what we can quantify. What could $1 trillion do for cancer research or alternative energy discoveries or any of a myriad of problems we would like to solve but cannot because of lack of resources.

If we are not stable economically, then we are not secure as a nation.

We are now on our way to the next trillion. This hemorrhaging of our collective resources for war has to stop now.

Mrs. Nasira Abdul-Aleem

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Tea

Dorothy Snodgrass (May 25) says she’s lived in London “for extended periods of time,” and that “...... high tea, if you don’t know, is something special, one you might enjoy at Harrod’s or Selfridges Department Stores. There you’re served from a two-tiered tray with dainty cucumber and watercress sandwiches, scones with clotted cream and jam, and, of course, a large pot of tea.”

Having grown up in England, I can tell you that the words “high tea” aren’t going to get you far in either of those great stores. What Ms. Snodgrass refers to is afternoon tea. What we call Main street, the British call High street, and that’s the sense in which the term high tea is meant to be used: it’s a main sort of (traditionally working class) meal. Here are a couple of web sites (there are scores of them) that help to explain:

http://whatscookingamerica.net/History/HighTeaHistory.htm

High Tea is often a misnomer. Most people refer to afternoon tea as high tea because they think it sounds regal and lofty, when in all actuality, high tea, or “meat tea” is dinner. High tea, in Britain, at any rate, tends to be on the heavier side. American hotels and tea rooms, on the other hand, continue to misunderstand and offer tidbits of fancy pastries and cakes on delicate china when they offer a “high tea.”


Revan Tranter

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Afghan Women

Afghan President Karzai’s recent visit to the US has been in the news, but stories
about the reality of life for Afghan women has been missing. I recently heard the story of Bebe, a young Afghan woman, through my support of MADRE (www.madre.org), and I will never forget it.

Bebe was only 12 when her family forced her to marry a member of the Taliban. The abuse started immediately. She was regularly beaten and forced to sleep with the animals.

Finally, when she was 17, Bebe tried to escape, but her neighbors reported her to the police. She was forcibly returned to her husband.

Days later, Bebe’s husband cut off her nose and both of her ears. This was her punishment for running away.

She barely survived the attack. But after receiving treatment, she found a safe haven at a women’s shelter supported in part by MADRE’s Afghan Women’s Survival Fund.

This is the type of story we must remember, of courageous Afghan women demanding their rights. As Afghan people work to build their future, it will depend on the bravery of women like Bebe and the support we in the US can extend to them.

Sian Taylor Gowan
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Republican Fearmongering

Must be an election time again. Republicans are rolling out the old familiar anti-immigration, fearmongering and hate-mongering-in efforts to divide and confuse the electorate.

To show you how bad it is, Republican John McCain who with Ted Kennedy proposed comprehensive immigration reform, has gone over to the forces of nativism and xenophobia.

Republicans are targeting Hispanic and Latino immigrants this election season instead of blacks. Is it any wonder that there are so few African-Americans in the Republican Party and will it be any wonder that few Hispanics and Latinos will flock to the GOP “Big Tent”?

Republicans have to fall back on “wedge” issues every election because they have nothing to offer. They won’t touch the real issues like jobs, drugs, education, crime and the Gulf oil spill except to talk about them and spin the subject.

And heaven forbid you say “we’re all in this together” when there is a conservative or Tea Party Republican around.

Ron Lowe
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Thanks

I wanted to express my gratitude to Becky O’Malley and the staff at the Berkeley Daily Planet for their efforts in keeping the paper alive. How in the world, are people going to find out what is going on in this town if it weren’t for the Planet’s informed news?

All of a sudden, there is new construction on the South Bart station and empty apartment houses keep mushrooming all over this town, but most of us don’t have a clue as to what made it happen. Thanks also for offering an opportunity for people in this town to vent out their feelings through the letters to the editor.

I have been very distressed, however, by the despicable attacks on the paper by a small group of Zionists who are bent on destroying the paper. Having been brought up in Belgium during World War 2, I had first hand exposure to the horror of the Holocaust and the persecution of the Jews. Unfortunately, I believe that groups of people who have been persecuted often persecute others afterwards. There is no excuse for the harsh treatment of the Palestinians by Israel, their perpetual expansion into Palestinian land and their hoarding and acquiring lethal weapons which is a dangerous threat to the whole world.

I wish I had a lot of money I could donate to the Berkeley Daily Planet so it could be openly published again and I hope that some wealthy readers will make it happen. In the meantime, thank you and keep up the good work.

Andree Julian
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Democracy and Education

Schwarzenegger’s latest cuts to all Californians prove that we need democracy in our state government now more than ever.

Because a minority of the legislature can hold the budget process hostage, we’ll have another costly, late, and reckless budget that doesn’t represent the people. It’s no coincidence that the only state with minority rule on both budget and revenue also suffers from the worst deficit and the most painful cuts. We need 50% votes on both budget and revenue now.

The governor has shown that he’s scared of the student movement to save public education, but he can’t appease us by while harming our families and communities instead. A real commitment to education and to California means an investment in children and the working class. That kind of crucial support can never be delivered while California’s revenue stream is in the hands of a minority of legislators.

As Cal students, we care about the well-being of all Californians, not just our own fees. I want my younger siblings and little cousins to have the opportunities I have, but will they be able to reach higher education at all in a state that denies necessary medical care and childcare? We need sustainable solutions for California that don’t just alternate between cutting social programs and education. Funding for both is required to produce a well-educated work force, and the only way to get funding is through a democratic budget and revenue process.

Eli Wirtschafter
UC Berkeley ’13
Berkeley HS ‘09

Columnists

Dispatches From The Edge: Of Drone Wars & Buffalo Urine

By Conn Hallinan
Thu May 27 09:22:00 -0700 2010

Has the drone war in Pakistan’s rugged frontier finally come home? Was Faisal Shahzad, the bumbling Times Square bomb maker a blowback from the Obama Administration’s increased use of killer robots? David Sanger of the New York Times asks the question, and the New York Post says an “anonymous law enforcement” source claims Shahzad was driven to his act after witnessing drone attacks in Pakistan.

In fact, there is little evidence that the bomber ever saw drone assaults, or even that he received training. While one wing of the Pakistan Taliban initially claimed credit, they later denied it. If he was trained in Pakistan it was by that country’s version of the Gang That Couldn’t Bomb Straight.

But the question is real, and if the U.S. thought that killing people at a great distance was not likely to end up being a messy business, then the White House is deeply deluded.

The drone war has stirred up considerable anti-Americanism in Pakistan. Some of the designers of the current counterinsurgency war in Afghanistan, David Kilcullen and Andrew Exum, have denounced it as a “technology” fix that has alienated Pakistanis by chalking up a kill ratio of 50 civilians for every targeted Taliban or al-Qaeda leader. “Every one of these dead noncombatants represents an alienated family, a new desire for revenge, and more recruits for a militant
movement,” the two wrote in the New York Times.

The number of civilian deaths caused by the drones is a sharply debated issue. The Long War Journal blog puts the number at around 30, Pakistani sources argue the figure is over 1,000, and a recent study by the New American Foundation concludes that civilian casualties make up about 30 percent of the fatalities.

But the word “civilian” is a slippery one, because no one knows exactly what criteria the U.S. uses to distinguish a “militant” from a civilian. Is someone with a gun a “militant”? Since large numbers of males in the frontier regions of Pakistan carry guns, that definition would end up targeting a huge number of people. Is someone who offers hospitality to a Taliban member a “militant” and, thus, a legitimate target, even if it includes his whole extended family?

Who is targeted and how those decisions are made are the subjects of a growing controversy that has sparked at least one lawsuit in the U.S. and spilled over into international law.

According to the CIA, the drone war is legal, although the intelligence organization refuses to even admit it is using the killer robots in Pakistan. “The agency’s counterterrorism operations—lawful, aggressive, precise, and effective—continue without pause,” says CIA spokesman Paul Gimigliano.

No one disputes the program is “aggressive,” particularly under the Obama administration, which has launched more drone attacks in a little over a year than the Bush Administration did in eight.

Whether the attacks have been “precise” and “effective” is debatable. A drone did kill Pakistan Taliban leader, Baitullah Mehsud, but only after 16 tries in which over 300 people were killed, at least half of whom were civilians. The Agency also took credit for killing Baitullah’s successor, Hakimullah Mehsud, but reports of his demise turned out to be premature. The Pakistan Taliban leader surfaced in early May to claim credit for the Times Square bomber.

But “lawful” is promising to cause the Obama Administration a major headache.

The CIA strikes are “a clear violation of international law,” argues Notre Dame Law School professor Mary Ellen O’Connell, who says it would be like Mexican authorities bombing houses and hotels in the American Southwest because they may harbor drug lords.

In testifying before the House Subcommit-
and a stern warning that the sheriff will be watching carefully once the felons go back to work.

It’s not that the Obama administration has not pressed for some necessary changes at the banks, trading houses, and hedge funds. It’s that the administration, as in many other areas, has balked once again at pushing for necessary structural changes and instead has settled for some pretty good tweaking of the machinery. The Tim Geithner and Larry Summers team have, as the business consultants say, sub-optimized the administration’s windfall acquisition. What did it acquire? Pure Political Gold: They were handed the most powerful populist backlash against the greedy, corrupt, and reckless ways of the financial sector that this country has seen in nearly a century. And instead of reining in the masters of the universe who have profited mightily as the country has fallen into a hole, the Obama administration has decided to tighten some basic rules and give them a stern warning that this time the regulators will be watching like hawks. No, really, we mean it this time. Meanwhile, the lords of finance are breathing easier. Now they can go back to lording over our politics and economy.

The areas in which we are almost certain to see some tinkering are clear. There will likely be some sort of audit of the Federal Reserve Bank and the hundreds of billions it handed out to banks to save them from themselves. The robust attempts to substantially narrow the Federal Reserve’s supervision powers or to regularly audit the secretive agency have been neutered or completely excised. And keep in mind, a lot of the watering down of real reform is being done by Democrats working with Republicans. That way everyone can keep pontificating in front of television cameras about how shocked they are that gambling has been going on on Wall Street while never endangering those campaign donations they’ll need come November.

When the final bill is cobbled together we are also likely to see some sort of resolution agency with the authority to force the liquidation of any bank or institution that threatens the broader financial system. The Senate bill calls for a special insurance fund that the biggest banks would have to pay into so that there would be money on hand for bail-outs and unwinding the multi-billion dollar messes banks have been creating for themselves. That provision has met with so much Republican resistance that it may not make it to the final piece of legislation. Democrats are already announcing that they are not “wedded” to the concept. As if we thought they were ‘wedded’ to anything other than reelection. Of course, the current arrangement is to use taxpayer money to fix bank messes.

Banks may also be forced to reduce their proprietary trading business (in which they risk their own money on big market bets) but don’t count on it. The administration helped to torpedo an amendment that would have pushed them out of that business.

There will be new capital ratio standards, which means the banks will probably have to increase the amount of money they set aside to cushion the blow of future losses. The Senate bill also wants no single banking company to use acquisitions to grow to more than 10 percent of U.S. financial liabilities. We’ll wait and see if this piece makes it through. The Dems and the Obama people have essentially refused to take on the real challenge of forcing too-big-to-fail institutions to break into separate giant businesses that would not threaten to cripple our economy.

As for the sometimes dangerous but much-traded financial concoctions that are called derivatives, Missouri Democrat Blanche Lincoln has pushed hard on a provision to force banks to spin off their swaps business into separately capitalized entities. Lincoln is caught in a brutal primary election scheduled for June 8 in which she needs to seem tough on Wall Street. Chris Dodd has already made attempts to introduce amendments that would give Geithner the power to undermine Lincoln’s spin-off rule. The big banks are now focusing nearly all their lobbying firepower on killing Lincoln’s provision so most likely it will be cut completely from the compromise bill that Obama signs or the banks will get one of the many who do their bidding to put in another provision that neuters the only amendment with any bite.

We will probably see over-the-counter derivatives like foreign exchange swaps, forced through central clearing houses and on to electronic exchanges to supposedly increase the “transparency” of the trading business in these custom-tailored bets.

The final legislation will likely create a so-called Consumer Protection agency to patrol abusive credit products but no one should expect much from this rather squishy and vague provision. The administration has made a big deal of saying it doesn’t want car dealers exempt from the rules of this new agency as the House bill provides. OK, no problem with that, but did car dealers plunge us into a near Depression?

Does all this improve the regulatory oversight and controls of our financial sector? Yes. Is it enough to ensure that the stomach-wrenching, job-destroying meltdown that we are still emerging from can’t happen again? Not by a long country mile! The White House actually lobbied against amendments that would have introduced real changes in the structure and the incentives that drive the financial sector of our economy. The Brown Kaufman amendment, for example, would have ensured that the six biggest banks were broken up into smaller pieces that the government might actually be able to regulate effectively. Some of these amendments were designed to force banks, which benefit from federal guarantees, to stick to the traditional business of banking and push all the super-leveraged betting businesses into non-bank companies that would also be regulated. The administration and the leaders in both the House and Senate wouldn’t even let some of the more courageous amendments reach the floor for a vote or, as with Brown Kaufman, they let it through only after lobbying against it and be assured that it stood no chance of getting into their bills.

Take the Collins Amendment, which would have forced bank holding companies and non-bank financial companies to have the same minimum risk-based capital requirement guidelines as the FDIC-insured deposit banks. In other words, Collins wanted the new risk-based capital requirements to serve as a ‘floor’ for all financial businesses. Without that kind of cross-harnessing, the bonus-driven Vegas-style wagering will simply move to another part of the holding company or another section of the financial world and could still end up threatening government-insured banking institutions. And we know what happens when those institutions are in peril. Anyone in the mood for another taxpayer bailout? Tim Geithner, the man who has been most liberal with taxpayer money, begs to differ. He argues that setting that kind of baseline is too restrictive and that foreign banks would get a jump on the U.S. banks. Leave it to the discretion of our regulators, the administration has been telling the senators. Never mind that that same regulatory discretion has cost U.S. taxpayers the better part of a trillion dollars in bailouts, credit guarantees, and cheap money to Wall Street and the big banks. What it has cost us in lost jobs and economic productivity may never be tallied.

With Geithner and Summers designing its strategy, the Obama administration has refused to challenge the power of the big money men and the mega-banks. That would require breaking up the biggest of these
leviathans to reduce their influence over the economy and the policies of the nation. It would require forcing all financial institutions to significantly boost their risk-based capital reserves. It would require the separation of the traditional banking businesses that benefit much of the economy from the proprietary betting businesses that do little but create profits for bankers, traders, fund managers and their wealthy investors.

When Mr. Obama sits at his desk to sign the final bill into law, our biggest bankers will be relieved that after all this hue and cry, things will finally return to business as usual.

Iran, Brazil, Turkey & the Ghost of Lord Palmerston

By Conn Hallinan
Thu May 27 09:24:00 -0700 2010

Lord Palmerston—twice England’s prime minister during the middle 1800s—once commented, “England has no permanent friends and no permanent enemies, only permanent interests.” Watching the fallout over Brazil’s and Turkey’s recent diplomatic breakthrough on Iran brings Palmerston’s observation to mind: while U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was hailing our efforts of all parties.” A Foreign Ministry spokesman added that the agreement to send 58 percent of Iran’s nuclear fuel to Turkey will benefit the process of peacefully resolving the Iran nuclear issue through dialogue and negotiations.

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev called for “urgent consultations with all interested parties, including Iran, to decide what to do next,” hardly a call to arms. His First Deputy Prime Minister, Sergi Ivanov, said that while his country was “supportive” of the U.S., it was drawing a “red line” at unilateral actions that would create profits for bankers, traders, fund managers and their wealthy investors.

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He then added a pinch of Palmerston: “We have a completely different position. We have a trading relationship, and the potential to develop it. We have energy interests, human interests, and tourism.”

The Russians also made it clear that they would be unhappy with unilateral sanctions by the U.S. and the European Union. Such unilateral actions would be “of an extraterritorial nature beyond the agreed decision of the international community and contradicting the principle of the rule of international law, enshrined in the UN Charter,” according to the Russian Foreign Ministry.

The U.S. State Department’s claim that the “international community” is behind the U.S. is increasingly sounding like whistling past the graveyard.

Indian Foreign Minister SM Krishna said the Brazil/Turkey/ Iran deal was “a constructive move,” and pointed out that India has a “deep desire to have a friendly relationship” with Iran. He also pointed out that “The U.S. has its own foreign policy and India has its own.”

The Arab League’s General Secretary Amr Moussa said he hoped the agreement would “solve the current problem regarding the Iranian nuclear file.”

United Nation Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said, “We hope that this and other initiatives may open the door to a negotiated settlement.”

France’s President Nicholas Sarkozy, normally hawkish on Iran, called the deal a “positive step.”

Even the North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s (NATO) Supreme Commander, U.S. Admiral James Stavridis said the fuel swap deal was a “a potentially good development.”

This should hardly come as a surprise; just follow the ruble, the yuen, and the franc.

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But with rubles at stake, who worries about history?

Medvedev and Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan signed 17 agreements worth some $25 billion, including building four nuclear power plants. The two countries also discussed Russian participation in a Black Sea- Mediterranean pipeline that would make Ankara a player in the Central Asia energy game. The Turks also seem to be more favorably disposed toward Moscow’s South Stream natural gas pipeline to Europe.

And lastly, the Russian president said he would push to raise bilateral trade from $40 billion a year to $100 billion within five years.

If the U.S. thinks the Russians are going to have a falling out with the Turks over the Iran sanctions, then delusion is the order of the day in Washington.

And China? Brasilia’s number one trading partner, which loaned Petrobras $10 billion to develop Brazil’s huge South Atlantic sub-salt oil deposits? And just signed an agreement with Brasilia to develop a joint defense industry (no doubt lured by the $20-plus billion that Brazil is handing out in defense contracts)? Will China go to the mat for the U.S. over the Iran sanctions? See “order of the day” above.

France appears to be playing the dog that didn’t bark. Might Gallic discreetness have anything to do with a $12 billion defense deal with Brazil for 50 helicopters and four Scorpene submarines? Could it be the $10.2 billion Brasilia is shelling out for 36 of France’s Rafale fighter jets? The Rafale is very a cute airplane, not terribly fast, that came in third in an open competition with fighters made by Boeing and Saab. But as Rhys Thompson of ISN Security Watch notes, “The Brazilian government reiterated that the final choice of a fighter jet would be based on political and strategic considerations and not primarily guided by technical aspects.” In short, we buy your cookies, you be nice to us in return (and maybe lower European Union tariffs for Brazilian agricultural goods).

As more and more countries line up behind the Turkish-Brazilian deal, it looks less and less likely that the Security Council will pass sanctions, in part because the deal is a good one and represents a sea change in international power relations. But also because countries like Russia, China, India, and France are also keeping Lord Palmerston’s dictum in mind.

Blogbeat: Midnight Swimming in Berkeley

By Thomas Lord
Tue Jun 01 14:49:00 -0700 2010

News from the web-o-rama blogosphere...

Summary of today’s items:

* Berkeley’s “Measure C” is in the news and today’s column offers some analysis and links to handy information, along with an embarrassing personal story for your amusement.
A precious library, the Water Resources Center Archives, is under severe threat from state budget cutbacks. One of the bestest libraries you’ve probably never heard of... read more, below.

Speaking of troubled waters, Berkeley’s own Professor Bob Bea has recently been providing quite a bit of insight into the unfolding situation in the Gulf of Mexico. We link to some of his interesting commentary.

Berkeley’s own Robert Reich has issued a call to action. Help try to end “too big to fail” - see below.

Measure C: A Not So Easy Choice There was a certain night, some years ago, in my life. A really lousy night. Life's uncertainties had caught up with me. All hell was breaking loose in my personal affairs. I found myself quite sleepless - quite restless. I set out on a long walk to try to clear my mind and failed to make much progress on the mental aspects of that walk until, quite by accident, I realized that I was in Strawberry Canyon not far from a UC outdoor swimming pool that is a favorite of many.

At that hour, of course, the pool was locked up and quiet. There was only the tail end of a party winding down in the nearby building. I walked the trails through the woods at the periphery and, to my surprise, found a hole in the fence. The pool was locked but also, unofficially, open. Temptation.

I'm generally a pretty timid person when it comes to law breaking - heck, I often use hand signals while cautiously biking - but what with the turbulent waters of my life that night I decided to slip in, strip down to the bathing suit God gave me, and do some therapeutic laps. (“Strip down” -- “Eww, gross”. Well, for the record, I may have been nekkid but I did have the decency to not pee in the pool because that would have been gross.)

The evening did me a world of good. I went home to cope with my troubles with a much clearer mind and an invigorated body. There was some embarrassment when I noticed that a couple of the party goers who had strolled outside were watching, with apparent bemusement, as I put my clothes back on but, c’est la vie.

All of this is to say that I have at least some glimmer of an appreciation of the value of publicly accessible pools. Some supporters of Measure C on the upcoming ballot will tell you that it’s a matter of community values and legacy - “‘We don’t want to lose one square foot of our beautiful municipal pools’” [Youtube - Video - quoting Linda Maio during a pro-C rally]. I quite agree on the importance of our pools.

I only wish that I could personally support Measure C. I can’t. Let me go through some reasons and, more importantly, toss some source material at you to help you make up your own mind. No reason to trust me - please look into it yourself and be an informed voter on whatever side you pick.

Right here in this edition of the Berkeley Daily Planet is a piece by Mr. Robert Collier in defense of Measure C. This is a good compass to use to start mapping out some of the arguments for and against, even though I disagree with some of his statements.

One of his key points concerns the (in his view) “myth” that “Another pools ballot measure can be tried in a year or two from now. There’s no hurry”. In response he cites the (in his words) “fact” that “The Warm Pool and Willard Pool are slated for permanent closure in the next year if measure C is not approved.”

Indeed they are! In fact, the current warm pool is slated for permanent closure regardless of whether or not measure C is approved. The only questions for the warm pool are when and if a replacement will be ready. There is urgency in the sense that seamless availability of a municipal warm pool is better than a delay - but it is also true that if Measure C fails we can try again later, perhaps with a better measure. (What’s wrong with C specifically? I’ll get to that.)

The heart-string tugging of Measure C proponents stretches the truth here (which is not to make light of the consequences of extending interruptions of service).

Where Measure C begins to look sketchy to me is illustrated by some of Mr. Collier’s other alleged “Facts” vs. “Myths”. Where it looks quite sketchy to me is in the ambitions of the plans for what kind of pools to build. Links galore, follow:

Mr. Collier cites as “myth” that “Funds are likely to be siphoned off to the rest of the city budget and not spent on pools...” and the “fact” that “Measure C funds must be used exclusively for the purposes described in the ballot statement.” Now, have you read the ballot statement? It’s really quite remarkable in its indirectness. It is but two paragraphs long. The second, says:

For additional detail and background information on the pools bond, please use Records Online to access City Council Resolutions 64,797-N.S., 64,798-N.S., and 64,799-N.S.

To view those resolutions you have to jump several hoops. I’ll save you a step. Start here at “Records Online”, select the “Document Type” called “Resolutions”, select the “Legislative Body” called “City Council” and search on 64797, then 64798, then 64799. And, enjoy the legalese.

See how easy it is to figure out what you are actually voting on?

If you puzzle out those resolutions, as far as I can tell, the City of Berkeley is perfectly free to redirect general funds from the pools to other projects and make it up with borrowed Measure C money.

A related so-called “myth” that Mr. Collier cites is that “Measure C borrows money for operating expenses. This is irresponsible budgeting.” Borrowing money for operating expenses is irresponsible (akin to paying your electricity bill on your credit card for more than you can afford to quickly pay off in full). The only question is, does Measure C do that? Mr. Collier argues that “No bond funds can be spent on operations” and, yet, the Council Resolutions upon which we are voting seem to allow such a possibility. It is true that measure C includes a tax for operations that is separate from the tax from repaying bonds but it does not appear to be true to me that bond money can not be spent on operating expenses. The new pools include expansions of service and the start-up operating expenses of those can be funded using Mello-Roos bonds.

At the heart of the matter, though - at least to my weary eyes (perhaps I should go for a swim) is this:

Mr. Collier cites the so-called “myth” that: “The $22.6 million cost is way too high.”

In response to that “myth” he names a prestigious consulting agent who came up with that figure. What Mr. Collier hasn’t told you is what instructions were given to that consultant - what plans they were trying to cost out.

Here is a link to The Berkeley Citywide Pool Masterplan prepared by the “Pools Task Force” which included Mr. Collier. This is the “vision” document which informed the City Council resolutions upon which we are voting.

The proposal Council considered is for some quite fancy pools. For fun, I suggest you take note of the proposed water slides, for example. I’ve nothing against water slides but as far as I can tell we could have been voting on four pools, including the warm water pool, for $10M strictly on capital expenditures while keeping operating expenditures “clean”. Instead, we’re voting on a project that includes too many “vanity” features at too great an expense with far too sketchy a financing model.
Please consider a no vote on Measure C and also please consider urging our elected representatives to come up with a better plan as quickly as possible.

The Water Resources Center Library You may have heard, over the many years, that it’s a bit difficult to work out exactly how much water should be moved from Northern California to the Central Valley for agriculture, or to LA for household use. Or you may have heard about the tricky and often legally contentious issues around the management of fish populations like salmon. Or, perhaps you’ve heard about the tricky engineering feats required to upgrade California’s bridges.

You may wonder (and if you haven’t, you should now wonder) where the people who work those issues in practice get some of the obscure information they need to do their engineering or design their legislation or plan their bridge renovations. As it turns out...

In its wisdom, some 50 or so years ago, the state legislature created a library archive to collect information about the condition and history of the state’s water resources. Today that library, the Water Resources Center Archives, is rightly hailed as the nation’s premier library on water resources. It is the “go to” research destination for private consultants, for the state government, and even for the federal government. It’s on-line resources have been used by nearly half a million people. Approximately 65% of the physical materials it maintains are unique to that library and quite precious.

Naturally, recent budget troubles in the University of California system have led to the threat of dismantling this library. No, really, it is under threat of losing the experts who maintain it and having the archived materials scattered about and generally rendered far less accessible, and far less likely to be updated in the future. Go figure. Why would any politician be in favor of obscuring vital information about California water resources? (“It’s Chinatown, Jake”?)

This reporter (yours, truly) is working on some more in depth coverage to be offered soon but, for now, please check out the advocacy site respectwaterarchives.org. It matters and Mr. Daniel Holmes (who is behind that web site) is helping to assemble some support to save that library.

Oil and Water Don’t Mix Berkeley’s own professor Robert G. Bea has been in the news a bit these days albeit in regards to a sad matter: the oil gushing into the Gulf of Mexico.

You may have caught him on “60 min-utes”.

I would like to call your attention to the raw footage of an interview he gave to KGO (channel 7, on TV) in which he anticipated the failure of the “top kill” effort and gave a quite compelling account of just went wrong to lead to the disaster: Professor Bea on KGO.

Bowling at Bankers The other day my wife and I were getting ready to check out at the express lane at Berkeley Bowl. As we approached the line I did a double take and then whispered to my wife about the guy ahead of us “Hey, do you recognize him? That’s Mr. Robert Reich”.

She didn’t entirely believe me until she heard his distinctive voice and cadence talking to the clerk.

I, of course, got all nervous and was trying too hard to not bug him to actually succeed at not bugging him. At the same time I was trying to think of something clever to say. My wife noticed this and, ever the mixer, loudly said “Try not to stare! :-)”.

Damn. No choice and nothing clever to say. I managed, as he looked over, to blurt out: “Uh, hi. I like your blog.” Well, I’m no Leah Garchik but Mr. Reich quipped “At least somebody reads it.” And, as we all had biked there that day, he passed along that the Bowl was offering some discounts that day for folks with bike helmets. Sound economic advice.

I do like his blog. Recently he issued a call to action: What You Can Do to Bring Wall Street Under Control.

The Public Eye: Forecasting the 2010 Midterm Elections

By Bob Burnett
Sun May 30 14:56:00 -0700 2010

Less than six months out from the November 2nd US midterm elections, pundits continue to predict that Republicans will reduce Democratic majorities in the House and Senate, perhaps take control of the House. Seven factors will determine the final outcome.

First, the economy will play an important role. While most Americans feel the economy has stabilized, there remains a great deal of apprehension. Although 55 percent of recent poll respondents feel the US is headed in the wrong direction, most trust Democrats more than Republicans to address jobs and the economy.

Nonetheless, if US unemployment remains in the nine percent range, this will hurt Democratic candidates. And, that’s probably going to be the case: economic recovery is not going to be rapid, due to the fact that small businesses aren’t hiring — a situation the Obama Administration is trying to get Congress to address.

Second, many pundits believe the election will be a referendum on President Obama. At this point, Obama is like Ronald Reagan in that voters like him personally more than they like his specific policies. The President’s favorability ratings exceed his unfavorable scores by a twelve-point margin; however, his job approval ratings show an even split.

Third, Congress is much more unpopular than is the President. The latest polls indicate that 65-75 percent of Americans disapprove of the job Congress is doing. But there is dissatisfaction with both Parties; in voters’ eyes Democrats and Republicans share the blame and voters split on whether to support a generic Democrat or Republican on November 2nd.

There is an anti-incumbent mood in the country. A recent Pew Research Poll found that 27 percent of respondents were unlikely to vote for an incumbent candidate. And there is continuing anger over the bailouts. The same poll found that 49 percent of respondents were less likely to vote for a candidate if they had voted for “providing major loans to banks during the 2008 financial crisis”.

Fourth, the Tea Party Movement is impacting the Republican Party. An ABC News/Washington Post poll indicated that 27 percent of respondents supported the Tea Party movement — although opinions differed about what this movement represented. In the past several weeks we’ve seen Tea Party activists play a major role in Republican primaries in Utah and Kentucky. Some of the Tea Party candidates represent radical positions, such as getting rid of Social Security and Medicare, and it remains to be seen how well this will play in a general election.

Fifth, non-political events could affect the November 2nd outcome. 2010 has already seen a failed attempt to ignite a massive bomb in Times Square, the disruption of transatlantic air traffic by ashes from the Eyjafjallajökull volcano, depression of the international economy by economic turmoil in Greece, and a massive oil leak in the Gulf of Mexico. Another event – the capture of Osama bin Laden or the collapse of the global economy – could prove decisive.

Nonetheless, as November 2nd draws closer, it seems more likely that how well
Democrats and Republicans do will depend less on exogenous factors such as how voters feel about President Obama or the Tea Party movement, and more on endogenous considerations such as the relative financial strength of the Democratic and Republican Parties and the quality of their candidates.

Sixth, Democrats have raised more money than Republicans. For example, at the end of April, DCCC (Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee) had $27.3M cash on hand compared to the NRCC’s $11.4M. However, ROLLING STONE recently reported that Bush villains Karl Rove and Ed Gillespie are leading an independent fundraising effort to benefit Republican candidates. In some races the financial hand of Rove could prove to be decisive.

Finally, even in a tumultuous year, what will be decisive is the quality of the Democratic and Republican candidates. For example, Democrats are prepared to cede a Senate seat in North Dakota, where Democratic Senator Byron Dorgan is retiring, because they don’t have a compelling candidate to compete with Republican John Hoeven. On the other hand, Oregon incumbent Democratic Senator Ron Wyden is expected to easily win reelection in November, because Republicans don’t have an effective candidate. But in Missouri, where Republican Senator Kit Bond is retiring, the competition is expected to be very close; the prospective opponents will likely be Democratic Secretary of State Robin Carnahan and archconservative Republican Congressman Roy Blunt.

On November 2nd it’s probable that Democrats will lose seats in the House and Senate but still retain control of both bodies. Voters are angry, but their anger is diffuse, directed at incumbents in both Parties. There’s unlikely to be a strong tide that will carry sweep Republicans into power across the country.

The wild card is the economy and, more generally, unforeseen catastrophic events. In a strange year, there’s an unusual amount of uncertainty in the election.

Bob Burnett is a Berkeley writer. He can be reached at bobburnett@comcast.net

“Old age is not a disease -- it is strength and survivorship, triumph over all kinds of vicissitudes and disappointments, trials and illnesses.” Margaret Eliza Kuhn (1905-1995) What follows is a statement of some of the facts of life as they relate to elders’ health in terms of longevity, awareness, and self-help. My premise is that we - like Maggie Kuhn -- are responsible senior citizens. She identified 6 myths about old age... That it’s a disease, a disaster. That we are mindless, sexless, useless, powerless. And that we are all alike.

Longevity refers to “great duration of life, length or duration of life.” According to IBM, by 2030, 20% of the United States population will be 65 years of age or older. Human longevity runs in families. For unexplained reasons, the Caspian Republic of Georgia holds the record for the longevity of its population. Wikipedia records that the oldest person in history whose age has been verified by modern documentation was Jeanne Calment (1875-1997, 122 years and 164 days).

Some animals do not age, although nonaging animals tend to be more primitive species. For animals that do age, the likelihood of death increases each year after progeny are raised to independence.

Women as a group live longer than men. Awareness: “The patient’s autonomy always, always should be respected, even if ... the decision is contrary to best medical advice and what the physician wants.” [Murad “Jack” Kevorkian, M.D. (1928- ).] With only 1 in 4 people having an advance directive in place, critical decision-making will be left to others at the end of life. While it is important to have an “advance health care directive”, you should be aware that it does not ensure that you will receive the treatment you want, or not receive treatment that you do not want. Suppose you are a senior citizen with no family and that you live alone, which is not that unusual. Is there anything else you can do in your own behalf?

The HIPAA Privacy Rule is supposed to protect the privacy of individually identifiable health information and the confidentiality provisions of the Patient Safety Rule and to improve patient safety. Despite HIPAA, many physicians’ offices and clinics use patient sign-in sheets or call out the names of their patients in their waiting rooms.

The ultimate barrier between patient and physician/hospital is the P.O.L.S.T. - Physician Order(s) for Life Sustaining Treatment, placed in one’s chart by the physician. At best, the advance directive merely guides him/her. A “POLST” form states what kind of medical treatment a patient wants toward the end of life. Signed by both doctor and patient, it helps provide seriously ill patients with a bit more control over their end-of-life care.

Self-Help: Mary Ann Wilson, a registered nurse in the field of geriatrics, and no spring chicken herself, is founder and host of Sit and Be Fit, an award-winning exercise show broadcast on PBS television channels, currently on KCSM and KTEH. She demonstrates a variety of exercises for the elderly and people with limited mobility. They can be done with little effort while sitting in or using a chair. She also demonstrates occasional standing exercises. Three of Wilson’s DVDs are in the Berkeley Public Library Collection: “Sit and be fit, All American workout”, “Sit and be fit, Balance & fall prevention workout”, and “Sit and be fit, Osteoporosis workout II.” Completion of the 8-hour Mature Driver Program (e.g. AARP’s driver safety education program offered at some senior centers) for drivers age 55+ may result in lowered automobile insurance. The completion certificate is valid for 3 years and can be renewed by completing a 4-hour course. The DMV has published a senior driver’s handbook, “Senior guide for safe driving,” available online or phone (800)777-0133.

Medicare does not fund hearing aids. We must work on this! In the meantime, the Hearing & Speech Center of Northern California is a non-profit agency located in San Francisco. Its mission is to provide professional services to support people with hearing or communication challenges in achieving their goals. There are no solid, consistent data on the numbers of people with hearing loss. Taken together, studies suggest that:

30% of all people over the age of 65 have hearing loss 65% of all people over the age of 85 have hearing loss 50% of people with hearing loss are of working age (18 - 64). Many senior centers provide hearing loss support groups. A “Coping with hearing loss” class is offered at the North Berkeley Senior Center on Wednesdays at 1:15 P.M.

Long Term Care and Aging constitutes a portion of the California Commission on the Status of Women’s current budget and legislative concerns; Violence and Women veterans are other agenda concerns impinging on older women. Nationwide, 59% - 75% of long-term caregivers are women; California leads with an estimated 3.4 million caregivers. The aging population has far more women than men, twice as many women as

Senior Power: “Old age is not a disease”

By Helen Rippiker Wheeler
Sun May 30 15:03:00 -0700 2010
First Person: Politics--Why Bother?

by Harry Brill
Tue Jun 01 11:43:00 -0700 2010

I love music. I play the saxophone, and recently I have been teaching myself how to play the clarinet. Despite some similarities, I find learning the clarinet somewhat difficult. Among my problems is making a smooth transition from lower to higher notes. This has taken a considerable amount of time, concentration, and very repetitive practice. Leaping from below middle C to high C without screeching is a challenge. But it is very important to me to play gracefully and musically.

You might be wondering, if you got this far, why I’m babbling about this. An obvious question is whether I’m being too self-indulgent. No, I don’t believe I am. Please read on. I know that many individuals and families are experiencing far more serious problems than how to reach the high notes. Working people are losing their jobs, poverty is on the increase, foreclosure rates are high, families are under considerable stress, the environment is killing people every day, many millions who are sick cannot afford health care. Then, of course, there are the killing fields in Afghanistan and Iraq. And nor do nonhuman animals escape suffering and destruction. What a mess. Like many other activists, who are generally empathetic people, this obsessed clarinet player is also deeply troubled about these issues. The widespread suffering is very, very painful to virtually all of us. Yet I, as well as many of you, continue to be involved politically, doing with others whatever I can.

I have asked myself the question of whether there is any underlying principle that has propelled me over the many decades that I have been active, despite the frustrations, obstacles, and disappointments. Yes indeed. I think there is. The answer is implied in my musical involvement. Metaphorically speaking, I would like us to live in a society in which a major concern of people everywhere is similar to mine at the moment, to gracefully reach the high notes on their instrument. In other words, during our very short life span people deserve to experience the joy of living. I would like to believe that struggling for a better life for all, ranging from our own families to strangers we have never met, will move us closer to achieving the peace of mind and the joy that the human race is entitled to. Yes, that’s why the object of our efforts cannot be only ourselves. Still, those who are more fortunately situated should feel free to enjoy life while you are helping others to enjoy it too.

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Wild Neighbors: The Wild Turkey: Threat or Menace?

Joe Eaton
Tue Jun 01 15:04:00 -0700 2010

I’ve avoided wild turkeys as a subject since that unpleasant business with the Sierra Club a couple of years ago, when I caught hell for writing that the environmental impact of these introduced birds had not yet been documented. Now, finally, there’s a study, published last year in the journal Western Birds, entitled “Food Habits of the Wild Turkeys in National Forests of Northern California and Central Oregon.” Does it shed badly needed light on the controversy? Well, sort of.

The case against the turkey seems to have two main arguments. First, wild turkeys are aliens; the ones in California are primarily Rio Grande and Merriam’s turkeys from the Southwest. Thus they’re a new, and unpredictable, element in our ecosystems, and might outcompete native birds like the California quail. (However, a very similar
species was present in Southern California until about 11,500 years ago, and a couple of prehistoric turkey bones have been found in caves in Northern California.)

Second, wild turkeys are omnivores. Back east, they’re known to eat a lot of acorns and the occasional lizard or salamander. Concern has been expressed about turkey predation on vulnerable species, although I don’t know whether they’ve ever been caught in the act. If a turkey happened to consume a newt, a highly toxic amphibian, that would be one less turkey.

I have a suspicion that a lot of the anti-turkey animus comes from the fact that these are large, loud, untidy birds that sometimes become aggressive with people. Also, their presence makes turkey hunters happy. These are not major themes in the public discourse, though.

So here’s the Western Birds article, whose authors spent three years collecting, classifying, and analyzing over 400 turkey droppings in the El Dorado, Modoc, Plumas, Tahoe, and Mendocino National Forests, plus two national forests in Oregon. The feces of tom and hen turkeys, it seems, are visibly distinct, so it was possible to categorize the diets of both sexes. Plant remains in the droppings were identified to species where possible.

The turkeys were found to have been eating variable proportions of plants and insects. Plants were broken down into grasses, sedges, forbs (herbaceous flowering plants), coniferous trees, shrubs, seeds, roots, ferns, and agricultural grains. Acorns were apparently subsumed under seeds. The birds consumed more seeds and flowers than stems, roots, and leaves. Grass consumption ranged from 1.3 percent among spring males in the Modoc National Forest to 66.8 percent for summer males in the Plumas National Forest. Females in Oregon’s Deschutes National Forest favored conifer seeds in spring. In the Modoc, 95.8 percent of the spring males had been eating forbs.

In California, hens ate a higher proportion of insects than toms.

This may indirectly reflect the dependence of young turkeys on insects, since females have to show the poults what’s edible and what’s not. The difference between the sexes did not show up in the Oregon sample.

No small vertebrates were reported, though. Are the turkeys off the hook? Maybe, maybe not. The way the data are presented, you can’t really conclude that none were found. It’s also curious that acorns weren’t analyzed as a separate category.

There’s also a credibility issue. Two of the authors of the article are contract biologists with MGW Biological Surveys in McKinleyville. Contract biologists are a mixed bag; I don’t know about MGW, but some have acquired the reputation of finding what their clients want them to find. The other two are affiliated with the National Wild Turkey Federation, a turkey hunters’ interest group. These folks have conducted other research projects which (surprise!) absolve turkeys of wrong-doing. One found that turkeys are blamed for more damage to vineyards than they actually cause.

The NWTF’s web site (www.nwtf.org) is worth a visit. Its on-line Turkey Shoppe offers all kinds of turkey wearables, collectibles, and paraphernalia, including turkey-track ties, turkey trailer hitch covers, and a beard rack. A beard rack is where you display the hairlike chest plumes of trophy-rank tom turkeys. If you’ve seen Errol Morrici’s early film “Vernon, Florida,” you’ll be familiar with the concept.

I am not bashing turkey hunters. But, I suspect that like most hunters they’re primarily interested in maintaining a gosized population of their favorite huntable critter, with other environmental considerations taking a back seat. That’s why elk hunters in the Rockies have lobbied to eradicate wolves; why hunters in Hawai’i have blocked efforts to remove feral pigs and goats from remnant native forests.

In short, these are not the people you’d go to for an impartial assessment of how wild turkeys are affecting their environment.

It’s like relying on Monsanto to evaluate the impact of genetically modified crops, or on BP to... you get the idea.

I don’t know whether Western Birds is peer-reviewed, but perhaps its editors should have thought twice about accepting the article.

We’re still waiting to hear from scientists who don’t have a dog, or a turkey, in this fight.

Arts & Entertainment

Theatre Review: “I love criticism just so long as it’s unqualified praise.” – Noël Coward

By John A. McMullen II
Tue Jun 01 12:20:00 -0700 2010

This past Sunday, I opted to spend my 1,492nd sunny weekend afternoon in a darkened theatre, so I drove from Oakland through the Cold-to-Hot tunnel to the Dean Lesher Center for the Arts in Walnut Creek to see The Marvelous Party at Center Rep. Bay Area Critic Circle awarded this company best musical last year, so I wanted to see what was up out there. I found I could joyously give the late Sir Noe&eml; Coward the criticism he so loved!

When I was a little boy and urged my pop to come play catch with me around noon on a Saturday, my wise father, fearing for his red-headed son’s sunburn, would always sing, “Only Mad Dogs and Englishmen Go Out in the Mid-Day Sun.” By Coward, of course. When my great uncle and aunt who played vaudeville would visit, they would duet on lovely airs that I later found were Cowardly. A few years ago, I played Charles in Blithe Spirit, then directed Design for Living (his bisexual, triad comedic romance) at THTC, and deeply invested my time in listening to all of Noel’s lyrics to use them for entr’acte music. As NC quipped about critics, “I have always been very fond of them... I think it is so frightfully clever of them to go night after night to the theatre and know so little about it.” So I fancy that I was “in the know” about this revue.

All quotations are from Coward’s indefatigable, perceptive jeux d’esprit and his very deep well of songs. Charming melodies,
but for the most part just a ditty on which to hang his *bon mots*. The players sing these very complicated, syncopated, internally rhymed lyrics seemingly in one voice, which is mostly new. It is a revue, a look-back, on the incredible life and creativity of an iconic figure, as we picture him somewhere at a London drawing room cocktail party, looking dapper and gay in smoking jacket while balancing cigarette holder and martini, and speaking something unbelievably clever to his rapt minions as his haunting melody "Mad About the Boy" plays in the background.

The set places us perfectly in a rich dark blue and gold Art Deco foyer or dance floor of a grand hotel’s ballroom, with ever-changing backdrop from blue sky to pink neon showing through the double French doors. The accompanying band plays in the upstage alcove while varied red ruffled drapes turn to starry lights. They even change chandeliers. The lighting never calls attention to itself, but seamlessly serves the scene right down to the follow-spot operator who never loses aim.

It is as polished and posh as is due a Coward revue. All three Equity actors show us what it means to be professional. The words of Coward and all his *bon mots* are articulated in full studied British Received Pronunciation; when they speak, though they hit all the right vowel changes, articulate their final consonants and vary their pitch appropriately, it’s still an American actor doing a very good imitation. When they sing all pretense disappears, and you relax into their comedic shenanigans or sophisticated torch songs.

**Tenor Mark Anders** and Baritone **Carl J. Danielsen** look British and both play it with panache, easy confidence, and mastery of the material that comes when one is the "devisor" of the piece. Their "2 Pianos 4 Hands" was a hit a few years ago; they toss off their piano virtuosity as if it’s all-in-good-fun.

Molly Bell’s blonde marcelled hairdo and versatile soprano recalls the fashion and musical styling of the period. Ms. Bell is probably now a candidate for best actress in a comedy/musical; she ends the first act with a comedy/musical piece. She’s a versatile soprano recalls the fashion and musical styling of the period. Ms. Bell is probably now a candidate for best actress in a comedy/musical; she ends the first act with a highlight of Coward’s *Hands* was a hit a few years ago; they toss off their piano virtuosity as if it’s all-in-good-fun.

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The choreography of Patricia Wilcox is mostly subtle with perfect gestures and dancing in place, until she breaks out with surprises that hike our spirits. Molly Bell’s Charleston captures the joy and sex of the Lost Generation’s exuberance. **Anders and Danielsen** trade off coats and piano playing in a perfectly rehearsed shick. As Coward said, "I like the kind of spontaneity you get with five weeks of rehearsal."

The first act is English Music Hall all the way right down to the sign on the easel announcing the next act and the Cockney in his derby leaning against the lamp post. The plotting of the variety of selections to change moods that lift and then soothe our spirits is smoothly planned. In the midst of the first act they boost us with a highlight of some flooring of the first caliber, not just kick/ball/change but some buck’n’wing in a Fred and Ginger-like duet between Carl Danielsen and Molly Bell (pictured above).

There is no investment in trying to believe the illusion, and everything changes every three minutes or so. However, the barrage of wit and cleverness is somewhat overwhelming even for those in the know, so I recommend purchasing some liquid lubrication (booze) in the lobby that you can take into the theatre during the interval. One last Coward quotable: "I will accept anything in the theatre . . . provided it amuses or moves me. But if it does neither, I want to go home." Everybody came back from intermission.

Definitely worth the price of admission; if I’d seen it in NYC for 100 USD, I’d be all aflutter.

**A MARVELOUS PARTY: The Noël! Coward Celebration** presented by Center Repertory Theatre, Michael Butler, Artistic Director and Scott Denison, Managing Director playing at Margaret Lesher Theatre, Lesher Center for the Arts, 1601 Civic Drive, Walnut Creek, CA 94596

Wed 7:30 pm, Thu-Sat 8 pm, with Matinees Sat & Sun 2:30 pm through June 26. 
Tickets: [www.centerrep.org](http://www.centerrep.org) or 925-943-SHOW (7469)

Words and Music by: Noël! Coward; Devised by: David Ira Goldstein, Carl J. Danielsen, Mark Anders and Patricia Wilcox. Directed by David Ira Goldstein, musical direction by Brandon Adams; musical staging with Patricia Wilcox; musical arrangements by Carl J. Danielsen; scenic design by Bill Forrester, sound design by Jeff Mockus, lighting design by Kurt Landisman, props management by Laraine Gurke, costume design by David Kay Mickelsen, wigs by Judy Dishrow. Stage Management by Corrie Bennett.

With: Mark Anders, Molly Bell, Carl J. Danielsen.

**John A. McMullen II** is the newest member of the San Francisco Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle.

Comments from lucrative job offers to Eye: From The Aisle@gmail.com

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**Home & Garden**

**Restoration Comedy: Trial by Modification**

By Jane Powell
Sun May 30 14:54:00 -0700 2010

I’m ba-aack! And I’ve finally come up with an actual title for my column, which pretty much describes my life as well. I’ll still mostly be writing about stuff related to old houses, though it may cross into real estate, land use, historic preservation, and whatever else the editor allows me to rant about. But I consider the comedy part of the title to be as important as the restoration part.

In my last column, which was like September of 2008 or something, we were discussing hardware. But I’m not going to back to that right now, though no doubt I’ll get to it eventually if I manage to keep writing on some kind of schedule. Instead, I want to relate my own experience with my (so far) vain attempt to get my mortgage modified.

As many of you know, I am the proud owner of the 1905 Jesse Matteson House in Oakland- in my view one of the finest Arts and Crafts houses in the entire United States, and nicknamed by my friend Paul Duchscherer “the bunga-mansion.” (Because it’s too big to be a bungalow.) By rights, it should probably be a house museum with a staff and a fundraising arm and lots of restoration architects at its beck and call. In which case it would no doubt be struggling as many house museums are right now, but that’s a subject for another time.

The Second Great Depression has cut my income in half, while not reducing the 6.375% interest rate on my first mortgage. Refinancing is not an option, since the stated income mortgages that were such a boon to self-employed people like me are gone as well. Not to mention that my house is now underwater, also thanks to those who destroyed the economy. And before you reach for those mental tomatoes about people who...
took out mortgages they couldn’t afford and lied on their applications and blah, blah, blah- first of all, that is a line of BS put out by the banks that should have been completely discredited by now, second of all, when I took out this mortgage I COULD afford it and my FICO score was 818. And by the way, I am still paying the mortgage, on time, though I am now spending my inheritance in order to do that. So STFU.

So when Obama’s mortgage modification plan went into effect I figured I’d give it a try, especially since my lender (GMAC) had decided to turn itself into a bank just so it could get some of the TARP money. I knew I didn’t want to negotiate with them directly- dealing with the kind of mindless idiocy I was likely to encounter causes me to swear and slam down the phone in most cases. I decided to go through a housing counselor, organizations or people approved by HUD to help homeowners with the process. I chose an organization called the Neighborhood Assistance Corporation of America, or NACA, mostly because of their record of going after predatory lenders successfully, and also because they were pretty “in your face” about it. Because, you know, I’m so tactful and reticent myself.

After attending the requisite introductory meeting (last October), I first had to fill out a whole bunch of forms online, detailing my income and expenses and so forth. One of the required forms is called a Hardship Affidavit, where there is a whole page of boxes to check off, various reasons why you can’t afford your mortgage payment anymore- essentially asking the lender to take pity on you because your income went down, or you had to take time off to care for your aging parents, or you got cancer, or whatever. There were (number) boxes in total, and I was able to check off nearly all of them. Then on another page you get to explain in more detail why your life totally sucks. By the end of it you feel like a contestant on the old game show Queen For A Day. (For those too young to remember, three women contestants would come on the show and relate their tale of woe- whoever was the most pathetic won a washing machine or something...)

To say the process is not set up for people with multiple income sources would be an understatement- I have writing income, royalties, consulting income, book sales, rental income (I rent out rooms in my house), and a part-time retail job.

Having filled out the online forms, I then had to fax hard copies of some of the exact same forms, as well as tax returns, mortgage and HELOC statements, property tax statements, etc. to NACA. Since there was no form for self-employment online, I sent a Profit and Loss statement instead, since this is what GMAC required. As I should have expected, this was not acceptable, because anyone who dares to ask for a modification is by definition a deadbeat who would be perfectly capable of slicing and dicing their Quickbooks file like Martin Yan on speed. Instead, I was informed, I would have to provide six months of bank statements with all my business deposits and expenses circled. My protest that this would in no way reflect reality, given that some expenses went on credit cards, and some cash income went straight to petty cash, which was duly recorded in Quickbooks but didn’t show up on a bank statement, fell on deaf ears. So I dutifully circled as instructed, and faxed the pertinent pages.

As a reasonable person I figured the pertinent information was what they wanted. What was I thinking?!? No, they wanted every effing page of every freaking statement (I have three accounts), including the page on which you balance your checkbook, the page which contains nothing but your average daily balance, and even the page which says “This page intentionally left blank.” Next time you read a story about mortgage modifications in which some bank spokesperson says that “Homeowners are not submitting complete paperwork”- this is what they’re talking about!! Now, if you are the average person, you quite rightly threw those useless pages in the recycling bin. Will the bank accept this excuse? Of course not. Which is how I found myself at the local Chase branch, the one where I closed my accounts three months ago (that’s a whole other column too- in the meantime see moveyourmoney.info), paying $30 to get copies of the statements with missing pages, all so I could fax in “This page intentionally left blank.”

Six months of bank statements including the useless pages makes for a sixty page fax. Unless you work in an office with a seriously industrial fax machine, you can’t fax that many pages at once. But you can’t fax them in batches. And even if you manage to fax all 60, invariably they won’t all go through, and they only receive 28 of them. I finally started taking them to the NACA office to have them do the faxing. The last time I was there I met a woman from San Francisco who had come over for the same purpose. I asked how long she had been working on her modification. “A year,” she said.

To be continued

Berkeley Butterfly Walk
by Steven Finacom
Tue Jun 01 18:52:00 -0700 2010

About a dozen people joined eminent UC entomologist Jerry Powell on Saturday, May 29, 2010 for a leisurely butterfly-watching walk along trails at the top of Berkeley’s Panoramic Hill.

Views from the higher southeast elevations of Panoramic Hill were stupendous. The Bay spread out, visible from Santa Clara County to San Pablo Bay, sunny skies prevailed, and light breezes made for a pleasant ramble through meadows along the crest, then back along one of the fire trails on the shady north-facing slope of Strawberry Canyon.

A coyote, hawks and songbirds completed the wildlife cameos along the walk. The late rains meant that much of the seasonal landscape is still green.

More than a dozen butterfly species were spotted and identified by Powell and others on the walk. They included the California Ringlet, Lorquin’s Admiral, Umbre Skipper, Sara Orangetip, Field Crescent, Mourning Duskywing, Red Admiral, Chalcedon Checkerspot, Anise Swallowtail, Pipevine Swallowtail, Pale Swallowtail, and Western Tiger Swallowtail.

Powell said that there were fewer species than he expected of this time of year, possibly due to the cooler weather earlier this spring.

Powell is a Professor in the Graduate School at UC Berkeley and Director Emeritus of the Essling Museum of Entomology, where he started working in 1961. His
primary research interest is certain types of small moths.

When the group finally spotted a Sara Orange-tip—a white butterfly with vivid orange patches on the wing ends-fluttering along the trail in Strawberry Canyon, I thought of Berkeley native David Brower hiking these same hills as a boy in the 1920s, and looking for butterflies, including the Orange-tip.

At that time the Berkeley hills were undeveloped in their upper reaches, but also largely unprotected. Residential development would eventually sweep to the summit, north of the UC campus and south of Claremont Canyon. In the 1970s a sustained, and ultimately successful, struggle began to protect most of Claremont Canyon from residential development.

Hundreds of residential lots had already been subdivided for development, but almost all were eventually bought and incorporated into the East Bay Regional Park District.

The walk was sponsored by the Claremont Canyon Conservancy, a non-profit that grew out of that land use struggle and now works to protect and restore the natural environment of the canyon behind the Claremont Hotel.

This Saturday, June 4, the Conservancy is sponsoring another free walk, a “geology ramble” led by Martin Holden, from 10 am to noon. Meet at the Stonewall Road trailhead to the Claremont Canyon Regional Preserve. A vigorous climb is involved.

For more details see the Conservancy website at http://ccconservancy.homestead.com/home.html

See Professor Powell’s website, and if you want to know more about butterflies, visit the North American Butterfly Association (NABA) website.

**Events**

**Don’t Miss This**

*By Dorothy Snodgrass*

**Sun May 30 15:14:00 -0700 2010**

Readers of this week’s Online Planet will find a brand new, and we hope stimulating, feature “Don’t Miss This,” a list of especially interesting cultural, political and community events in the Bay Area. Given that “June is Busting Out All Over”, listing announcements for the coming month is a daunting task. Herewith are just a few of the attractions available in June:

“1001”, a new play by Jason Grote, Berkeley City Club, 2315 Durant Avenue. Now through June 20.

Chanticler: “For the Soul’s Salvation: Music for England’s Monarchs.” June 2nd, 8:00 p.m. First Congregational Church, Berkeley

Berkeley World Music Festival, People’s Park, Berkeley, June 5th, Noon - 9:00 p.m.

“Actors Reading Writers”, Local actors reading short stories, directed by Rica Anderson and Thomas Lynch, Berkeley City Club, Monday, June 7th, 7:30 p.m. Free, but donations welcome.

East Bay Chapter of the Great Society monthly meeting, Saturday, June 12th at 10:30 a.m., Albany Veteran’s Hall, 1325 Portland Avenue. Topic: World War I.

“Walk Like MADD,” Mothers Against Drunk Driving, Saturday, June 5th, 8:00 a.m., Lake Merritt, 666 Bellevue Avenue, Oakland

Live Oak Fair, Live Oak Park, 1301 Shattuck Avenue, Berkeley, June 12th & 13th, 10:00 to 6 p.m.

Summer Sounds, Free Outdoor Concerts every Wednesday, 12 - 1 p.m., Oakland City Center Plaza Stage

**Film Review: “Living in Emergency” — On the Ground with “Doctors without Borders”**

*by Gar Smith*

**Tue Jun 01 15:25:00 -0700 2010**


A warning: After seeing “Living in Emergency” — Mark Hopkins’ sweeping and intimate look inside the world of Médecine Sans Frontieres (“Doctors Without Borders”) — the first thing I did was write MSF a $100 check. You may feel similarly moved.

MSF, a 40-year-old organization that supports 27,000 volunteers in more than 60 countries, won the 1999 Nobel Peace Prize for bringing comfort to the victims of war in some of the world’s most desolate and dangerous places. While most volunteers are local, around 10% of MSF volunteers are professional practitioners who hail from Europe, Asia and the Americas. This riveting 93-minute film follows four international volunteers as they deal with the challenges of trying to save lives in war-ravaged Congo and post-war Liberia.

Filmed over the course of two years in Liberia, the Democratic Republic of Congo,

Pakistan, Niger, Kenya, Canada, the US and the MSF headquarters in Paris, the film was intended, in the director’s words, to “explore the limits of idealism” by “immers[ing] people in the MSF experience.” One of the film’s most striking images is the sign outside Monrovia’s Mamba Point Hospital that reads: “Free Hospital Care.” While the US still debates universal health care, free life-saving surgeries are available in the capital city one of Africa’s poorest countries — thanks to the volunteers of MSF.

Dr. Chris Brasheier — a charismatic original with a pierced eyebrow and mannerisms reminiscent of George Clooney and Mel Gibson — has seen a lot during his tours with MSF. On his latest return to Liberia, the camera captures his response as his car rolls down the streets of Monrovia: “It’s nice not seeing anyone with guns,” he marvels. Brasheier, an Australian now based in France, describes his discovery that “sometimes when people are poor, they’re more human.”

Having experienced several life-changing MSF tours, Brasheier finds it difficult to live in a European city where people seem to be acting out shallow, fictional masquerades instead of living anything like a real existence. “Most people in the world have a difficult time getting through the day, the week, a year,” Brasheier says. “I wouldn’t have known that. Now I know.”

There are graphic moments that go far beyond anything you may have experienced on an episode of “ER.” Amputations. A child with a head horribly disfigured by a mysterious swelling. A man whose intestines have exploded from his belly moaning as an MSF doctor, working by the flashlight, slowly massages the errant organs back inside the man’s body.

There are apocalyptic scenes of young Congolese men waging machetes and prancing down the street holding assault rifles
like dancing partners as they pop off rounds. And there are the inevitable scenes of the aftermath — a father whose ear has been shorn off by the bullet that entered his head (the doctors save his life) and the frightened boy whose arm has been nearly ripped off by a bullet (he is bandaged and comforted; his arm saved).

The doctors are committed, exhausted, resigned, sardonic and as riveting to watch as any A-list Hollywood actor. In a world of abiding stress and anguish, small affronts and petty squabbles can flare into resentment. Chiara Lepora, a beaming, hard-charging Italian doctor and Head of Mission flies into trouble spots in an attempt to solve personal disputes and winds up burying her face in her hands as personal critiques erupt into accusations and insults. “Anger and frustration are part of the process,” she observes, but it’s useless to get mad at each other: “We need to get mad at war.”

One prevailing problem is the angst of trying to do more with always limited resources. Lepora sums up the anger and frustration of Davindra Gill, a young doctor doing his first (and probably his last) MSF stint in Liberia. She compares Gill to Col. Kurtz in Joseph Conrad’s “Heart of Darkness” and concludes: “If you put a reasonable person in an unreasonable situation, becoming crazy is the most reasonable thing you can do.”

Liberia is bad, Lepora says, but the West Point district of the capital, is “catastrophic” (a fact the camera crew confirms with stark, gritty imagery). Still, she confesses, “not to intervene would be a criminal mistake.”

Becoming a MSF volunteer comes with the baggage of tough choices, the main one being that “you can’t help everyone.” MSF’s limitations, warns against depending on “expatriates” because they will always leave you: they never choose to stay. “But MSF is not about individuals,” he adds. “It is about everyone. The work will go on.”

**Arts & Events Listings**

**Classical Music-East Bay Through June 13**

**ALPHONSE BERGER GALLERY**
“Sweeter Than Roses,” June 10, 3:30 p.m. Program features works by Henry Purcell. $8-$15. (510) 649-9492.

2546 Bancroft Way, Berkeley. <www.alphonseberger.com>

**BERKELEY CITY CLUB**
Pacific Mozart Ensemble, June 13, 5 p.m. “Jazz and Pop” program features a variety of performances in various musical styles. $15-$25. (510) 848-8022.

2315 Durant Ave., Berkeley. (510) 848-7800. www.berkeleycityclub.com

**CROWDEN MUSIC CENTER**
“Very First Concerts: Learn to be a Conductor,” June 5, 11 a.m. This classical series for younger listeners gives you the chance at hands-on musical activities. Free. (510) 559-6910.

1475 Rose St., Berkeley. (510) 559-6910. www.crowdenmusiccenter.org

**FINNISH BROTHERHOOD HALL**
“2010 Jazz and Pop Concert,” June 5, 7:30 p.m. Program features an assortment of musical groups playing music of various genres. $15-$25. (510) 848-8022.


**FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF BERKELEY**
Sacabuche with Paul Elliott and Nigel North, June 10, 8 p.m. Program features works by Orlando di Lasso, Andrea Gabrieli, Giovanni Gabrieli, Claudio Monteverdi, Heinrich Schütz, Hans Leo Hassler and Alessandro Grandi. $32-$38. (510) 642-9988. www.bfx.berkeley.edu.

“Magnificat,” June 11, 8 p.m. Program features motets by Chiara Margarita Cozzolani. $32-$38. (510) 642-9988. www.bfx.berkeley.edu.

Marion Verbruggen Trio, June 11, 5 p.m. Program features works by Telemann, Handel and Bach. $32-$38. (510) 642-9988.

**LAKE MERRITT UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**
Oakland Civic Orchestra with Malin Fritz, June 6, 4 p.m. Program features works by Schubert, Elgar and Dvorak. Free. (510) 238-7275.

1330 Lakeshore Ave., Oakland. <www.fccb.org>

**MOUNTAIN VIEW CEMETERY**
Eric Symons, June 6, 4 p.m. The guitarist performs with Wendy Loder, violin/coloredatura soprano. Free.

5000 Piedmont Ave., Oakland. <www.piedmontpiano.com>

**PIEDMONT PIANO CO.**
“Orlando’s Sardana,” June 7, 7 p.m. Program features works by Pau Casals, Heitor Villa-Lobos, Samuel Barber, Richard Strauss and J.S. Bach. $20. (510) 547-8188.

1728 San Pablo Ave., Oakland. (510) 547-8188. www.piedmontpiano.com

**ST. ALBAN’S EPISCOPAL CHURCH**
Cello Haven, June 10, 8 p.m. Program features works by Villa Lobos, Bach and a Russian Liturgical Chant. Free. (510) 234-4502.

St. Alban’s Episcopal Church., 1501 Washington Ave., Albany. <www.stalbansberkeley.org

**ST. JOHN’S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**
Voices of Musica Sacra, June 6, 7:30 p.m. Program features the complete choral works of Samuel Barber. $15-$20. (800) 838-3006.

Jane Stillwater: Report Says That El Cerrito Resident Was Beaten By Israelis
Riya Bhattacharjee: East Bay Citizens Condemn Israel Attack on Gaza Aid Flotilla
Janna Brancolini: Mayan Refugee Given Two More Weeks Before Deportation
Craig Collins, Ph.D.: Endangered Species Act: Noah’s Ark or Titanic?
Jeff Shuttleworth: Judge Says He Will Issue Injunction Against Gang
Jewish Voice for Peace urges Jewish leaders to denounce Israel’s increasing violations of human rights and dignity.
Orange County Superior Court Rules that County Mapping Database is Exempt from the California Public Records Act
Berkeley Hillside Preservation Group Files Suit
George Lakoff: Below the Radar:

HUD Is Trying to Privatize and Mortgage Off All of America’s Public Housing
Barbara Gilbert: JUNE BALLOT MEASURE ON POOLS
Robert Collier: Measure C: Fact vs. Fiction
Barbara & Henrik Bull: BOND ISSUES: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE
Ralph E. Stone: Remembering Rachel Corrie
Ralph E. Stone: Time for Immediate Repeal of Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell Military Policy
JoAnn Cook, Elizabeth Gutfeldt, Odette Larde, Anne Marx, Summer Raven and Mertis Shekeloff: Measure C, the Warm Pool, and Wedge-Issue Politics
Justin Lee: Measure C Cartoon
Gray Brechin: Dancing on a Listing Deck
Ralph Stone: Can California Afford a $11.1 Million Water Bond?
Jack Bragen: Wetlands Versus Human Ignorance
Nathan Pitts, Autism Spectrum Liberation Front: Troubling Autism News
Conn Hallinan: Dispatches From The Edge: Of Drone Wars & Buffalo Urine
Richard Hylton: Funny Business: Snatched from the Mouth of Victory
Conn Hallinan: Iran, Brazil, Turkey & the Ghost of Lord Palmerston
Thomas Lord: Blogbeat: Midnight Swimming in Berkeley
Bob Burnett: The Public Eye: Forecasting the 2010 Midterm Elections
Helen Ripper Wheeler: Senior Power: “Old age is not a disease”
Harry Brill: First Person: Politics--Why Bother?
Joe Eaton: Wild Neighbors: The Wild Turkey: Threat or Menace?
John A. McMullen II: Theatre Review:

“I love criticism just so long as it’s unqualified praise.” –Noël Coward
Jane Powell: Restoration Comedy: Trial by Modification
Steven Finacom: Berkeley Butterfly Walk
Dorothy Snodgrass: Don’t Miss This
Gar Smith: Film Review:

“Living in Emergency” — On the Ground with “Doctors without Borders”