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SUPERVISORS BETRAY THE CIVIC ETHOS

by Michael F Brown

Recently the San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors approved a $1,000 cash payment to every employee within the County government (a $2.4 million Christmas gift at taxpayer expense). The payment was neither negotiated as part of union collective bargaining agreements nor planned for in the adopted 2014-15 County Budget. Because the Board did not agree to the payment as part of collective bargaining, the public received nothing in return. The following week the Board approved a 5% salary increase for itself. The agenda item stated that it was a step toward moving the Board more toward the "market." No comparative data was provided about county supervisor salaries in rural general law counties with populations between 200,000 and 300,000. No data was presented with respect to whether the salaries need to be raised to attract qualified candidates. We know a number of civic-minded individuals with managerial experience in complex organizations who would be glad to serve. These actions are emblematic not only of failure by the Supervisors to properly comprehend their role, but of the county institution itself.

The Underlying Issue: What is the proper functional role of County Supervisors? What should be their civic ethos? Are they independent, citizen, part-time, volunteer, policy-setting local legislators and watchdogs who jealously guard the private citizens' interests? Or are they full-time, salaried, politicized micro-managing insiders? One cannot effectively be both. Once they opt for the full-time, salaried version, they become an interested party in the whole scheme of progressive compensation and the consequent need for more revenue. In turn, their independence and objectivity with respect to salary and benefits policy is eroded as they become more and more vested in the system. Ultimately, their own salaries and benefits must foster their co-dependency with the employees' interests. The unstated principle of reciprocity and/or live-and-let-live infects their judgment. In effect, they lose their edge and share more interests with their employees than with the public, which is relentlessly taxed and fee-ed in order to perpetuate the system. They become part of the "team," or the so-called "county family," instead of incisive questioners and skeptical guardians.

An historical flaw of the California Constitution and County enabling laws is that they actually place County Supervisors in a combined legislative/executive position, which may have been workable in the 1870's when the state was a rural farming and ranching outpost and had only one significant city. In those days a rancher or merchant would volunteer to serve on a part-time basis. There was very little paid staff, and supervisors had to perform a variety of legislative, administrative, and clerical functions.

But today, do you really want a Jim Patterson or an Adam Hill making an executive salary plus benefits and ordering everyone around 24/7? The Board of Regents can't tell the UCLA Chancellor and football coach who should play linebacker.[1] They can't ban teaching about Shakespeare in the name of social justice or political correctness. (Of course the faculty already may have done this.) Unfortunately, County Supervisors think nothing of calling in staffers from 3 levels down and giving direction. Enhancing their ability to do this with more salary and benefits is insanity. It would be better if they had a day job (like Supervisor Arnold, who personally operates a winery and tasting room in Pozo and additionally has ranching duties).

The unique and animating historic genius of the American Constitutional system was and is that its key purpose is to protect people from their government. The Constitution and its derivative state and local laws recognize that on a practical level, government exists to insure freedom, safety of persons and property, legal stability, public order, and the general welfare in society. Its very distinctive character is that it recognizes that governments themselves have always been and always will be the greatest threat to those very purposes.

A materially vested, quasi-bureaucratic local legislature called the board of supervisors must, of logical necessity, fail to sustain this fundamental value. To allow the Board to institutionally align its personal material interests with those government officials and the employees they are supposed to control and constrain constitutes serious negligence by all of us.

Mike Brown has 42 years of state and local government experience as a budget director, city manager, county executive officer and housing commissioner.

[1] Actually the Regents can receive no salary. Their bylaws state in part: "**No Regent shall receive salary or other compensation for services as a Regent…"** Very successful busy people serve for the honor.

BIG OIL, BIG GREEN, BIG HYPOCRISY

BY JOE ARMENDARIZ

Remember John and William Rockefeller? The richest American brothers who ever lived and who made their family fortune in the oil drilling and refining business? Back in 1889, this industrious duo started a little family oil company called Standard Oil. The company eventually grew so enormous and so powerful that the U.S. Justice Department sued them for anti-trust violations. In 1911, the United States Supreme Court ordered the company broken up.

Standard Oil subsequently became 34 other, smaller, oil drilling and refining companies. Three of those companies came to be called Exxon, Mobil and Chevron. Team Rockefeller really loved the oil business, and their excellent adventure in drilling and refining made them the richest family in America — so rich that to this day, "Rockefeller" is synonymous with big money.

Speaking of big money, it turns out the Rockefeller family also loves showering its wealth on environmental organizations, including the Natural Resources Defense Council. According to Foundation Search, the Rockefeller Foundation has given the NRDC 18 grants since 2003 worth a total of $3.1 million. Since 1999, The Rockefeller Brothers Fund has given 12 grants to the NRDC worth a total $1.4 million. Since 2003, The Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors has given the NRDC 12 grants worth a total of $615,500. And since 2008, The Rockefeller Family Fund has given the NRDC three grants worth $350,000. This comes out to roughly $5.5 million to one environmental group alone.

Joe Armendariz is the executive Director of the Santa Barbara Tax Payers Association

Other environmental organizations that receive huge sums include the Sierra Club, which claims 2.4 million members, and the Environmental Defense Fund, which claims 750,000 members. Combined, these three environmental organizations report having net assets totaling nearly $500 million.

The Rockefeller brothers, through their foundations, have doled out millions of additional dollars to other environmental organizations as well, including $400,000 to the BlueGreen Alliance Foundation of Minneapolis; $700,000 to the Center For

American Progress, a liberal Washington, D.C. group that works toward ending America's reliance on fossil fuels; $400,000 to Climate Central, which works to educate the world about climate change and the impacts of sea-level rise; $1.1 million to Environmental Defense Fund of New York; $250,000 to Environmental Law and Policy Center of the Midwest; and $250,000 to Funders' Network for Smart Growth & Livable Communities Inc., just to name a few.

So it turns out "Big Green" is big business, funded in no small part by "Big Oil." An inconvenient truth, I'd say. Moreover, some people are getting pretty wealthy protecting the environment, including people working for green groups like the NRDC. In 2013, for example, the NRDC received $60.1 million in memberships and individual contributions. From that revenue stream, the organization paid its management team and general "support" staff $8.2 million. Its president was paid $432,742.

This is not uncommon. The president of Environmental Defense New York received $423,359. The managing director of the Pew Environment Group received $400,487, while the executive director of Environmental Defense received $347,963. Hey, if you are going to save the world from the rich, greedy polluters, might as well get rich yourself, right?

But it seems there is even more hypocrisy going on out there. Take Leonardo DiCaprio as an example. Remember him? The Wolf of Wall Street? The hopeless romantic who swooned on the doomed Titanic? The trending actor turned trendy climate-change speech-maker? Well, Leo and his buddy Robert Redford — we all know the aging American actor turned aging environmental do-gooder — sit on the board of, wait for it ... the Natural Resources Defense Council.

Very recently, as in a few weeks ago, Mr. Redford took it upon himself to insert himself into our local Measure P election. He wrote a fundraising letter to his super-rich Hollywood friends whereby he smeared "Big Oil" in general and Chevron in particular. Mr. Redford blamed Chevron for the 1969 oil spill off the coast of Santa Barbara. Problem is, it wasn't Chevron; it was Unocal. Unocal merged with Chevron in 2005, 36 years after the spill. Oops. It's not good when an actor's timing is that off.

But that's really beside the point. The larger point is that Mr. DiCaprio and Mr. Redford certainly talk the environmental talk, but do they really walk the environmental walk? Can they honestly serve two masters when it comes to environmental orthodoxy? If they feel so strongly that "Big Oil" is so awful, indeed criminal by virtue of their climate change rhetoric, by what ethical justification do they sit on the board of an organization that was initially formed from a grant from a foundation that received its money from the man who took the internal combustion engine viral (Henry Ford via the Ford Foundation), and that today receives millions of dollars from several foundations that got their money from the family who earned their fortune drilling and refining oil? What irony, to put it charitably (pun intended).

The unrefined truth is American oil companies do make big money — and also pay big taxes. In 2011, for example, ExxonMobil paid over $100 billion in federal income taxes; this comes out to over $200,000 in taxes every minute. But these companies also make big charitable donations, including to many well-meaning environmental causes, such as Chevron's commitment to protecting critical habitat for the California desert tortoise, and several other environmental projects and programs throughout the world.

Oil companies also create big stock dividends for their millions of individual shareholders, many of whom are public school teachers, city, county and state firefighters, nurses, as well as our local police officers. These public employees own oil company stocks inside their public pensions.

So at the end of the day, big green activists like Mr. Redford and Mr. DiCaprio should fade-out their righteous pose and stick to what they actually know — which is that in a glamorous world of make-believe, you can pretend all day long. But in the real world, far away from the "lights, camera, action" of Tinseltown, where ordinary, average hard-working people wake up each day and go to work to earn their ordinary, average paychecks, well, let's just say that extolling the virtues of being green while benefiting from the industries that help underwrite your politically correct, philanthropic exploits, is a luxury they simply can't afford.

This article first appeared in the November 23, 2014   Santa Barbara News Press.

Would environmental groups allow Rockefeller Center to be built today?

Ford Foundation headquarters. They are green but leave the lights on.

THE ECOLOGY VS. ENVIRONMENT DEATH MATCH

BY ANDY CALDWELL

Over the past couple of months, I have been highlighting the unintended, unforeseen consequences of the green energy movement. These impacts and effects range from presumably deadly emissions from battery recycling plants in Southern California to the deaths of thousands of endangered birds sliced and diced by wind turbines in the Bay Area. Another story that I wrote about had to do with the birds that are being fried in midair flight by the newest solar power plant in the Mojave Desert. This last story has since been updated by the Associated Press, revealing the fact that the bird mortality rate in the desert exceeds our worst fears.

Every two minutes a bird ignites into flames and falls to the ground in the form of a mini-fireball as it passes over the 300,000 mirrors that reflect heat to three water boiler towers that raise 40 stories high in the desert. The project provides electricity for nearly 150,000 homes but at the expense of tens of thousands of birds.

Even now, there are plans on building additional plants, on an even larger scale, despite the fact that the new projects present a bird mortality rate four times higher than the existing plant. Finally, as strange as it might seem, the plant operators are suggesting that project mitigation impact fees be used to spay and neuter domestic cats in order to stave off bird deaths as a form of compensation to Mother Nature!

Another aspect of green energy has to do with the environmental and ecological footprint of green energy in comparison to traditional forms of energy. This has to do with the sheer volume of space, both land and sea, that is needed by green energy to generate the same amount of power from other sources such as nuclear, oil and gas. For instance, wind farms require 700 times, and solar requires 450 times, as much land as does a shale gas operation, according to internationally renowned Professor David Mackay.

Locally, there are a number of people who claim that the blight from a handful of offshore oil derricks along the Santa Barbara coastline virtually mars the view of the ocean, the islands and the sunsets. They find this visual blight intolerable. Can you imagine their reaction to 3,400 tidal turbines off the California coastline? Plus, an additional 25,000 onshore turbines, 1,200 solar plants, 15 million roof-top solar systems, 72 geothermal plants and 5,000 wave devices? This is the picture of our green dream future, according to researchers from Stanford on what it would take to power California exclusively from wind, water and sun.

I am waiting for an honest debate between ecologists and environmentalists concerning the cost benefit of green energy. How about a visual depicting what our skylines and oceans would look like with millions of these devices strewn about? Tell us what happens to birds and sea life from these myriad structures? Perhaps the relatively rare impacts to flora, fauna and sea life from oil and gas operations aren't so bad after all.

Andy Caldwell is the Executive Director of the Coalition of Labor Agriculture and

Business (COLAB) of Santa Barbara County. He is a regular guest opinion writer for the Santa Barbara New Press. This article first appeared in the august 23, 2014 edition of the News Press.

CARBON-INCOME INEQUALITY

OBAMA'S NEW ENERGY RULE IS A HUGE TAX ON THE POOR AND MIDDLE CLASS

From the Wall Street Journal

President Obama vowed last year that he wouldn't wait on Congress to bless his anticarbon agenda, and the rule his Environmental Protection Agency proposed on Monday is equal to that promise. The agency is bidding to transform and nationalize U.S. energy the way ObamaCare is doing to medicine, but in this case without even the pretense of democratic consent.

The EPA's goal is to cut carbon emissions by 30% by 2030 from near-peak 2005 levels, which will inevitably raise the price of electricity and thus all other goods down the energy chain. The 645-page rule is targeted at the 1,000 or so U.S. fossil fuel power plants, but it more or less orders states to adopt cap and trade or a carbon tax.

A Democratic Congress debated and rejected this anticarbon program in 2010, and there isn't a chance it could get 50 Senate votes now. But no matter, the EPA claims the authority for this sweeping power grab by pointing to an obscure clause of the 1970 Clean Air Act called Section 111(d) that runs merely a few hundred words and historically has been applied only to minor pollutants, not the entire economy.

The new rule is unprecedented because EPA is supposed to regulate "inside the fenceline," meaning that its command-and-control powers are limited to individual energy generator sources. The agency can tell America's 3,000 or so fossil-fuel power units to install on-site technology like scrubbers to reduce pollution, but not beyond. Now the agency is taking a "systems-based approach" that usurps state responsibilities in order to move electricity production away first from coal and later natural gas.

The EPA is claiming states can choose whatever methods they like to meet the carbon targets, from shuttering plants to installing more green sources like wind and solar. But beware of the Obama EPA bearing gifts. The agency recently rejected state plans to reduce regional haze before they are even formally proposed and revoked permits it had previously approved.

The EPA also claims that by some miracle the costs of this will be negligible, or even raise GDP, but it is impossible to raise the price of carbon energy without also raising costs across the economy. The costs will ultimately flow to consumers and businesses.

As an alternative to a carbon tax, some states will force-feed wind, solar and other renewables that are both more expensive and less reliable than fossil fuels. Consumers may not realize how these regulations will affect their daily lives. Groups like the Natural Resources Defense Council and the Brookings Institution support a policy known as "direct load control" that would manage when you are allowed to run the air conditioner or washing machine.

The EPA claims to be targeting "polluters," but the government is essentially creating an artificial scarcity in carbon energy. Scarcities mean higher prices, which will hit the poor far harder than they will the anticarbon crusaders who live in Pacific Heights. The lowest 10% of earners pay three times as much as a share of their income for electricity compared to the middle class. If you want more inequality, this is an ideal way to ensure it.

The EPA plan will also redistribute income from economically successful states to those that have already needlessly raised their energy costs. The New England and California cap-and-trade programs will get a boost, while the new rule punishes the regions that rely most on fossil fuels and manufacturing: the South, Ohio River Valley and mid-Atlantic. Think of it as a transfer from Austin to Sacramento.

In eight short years this Administration will have accomplished the largest transformation of the U.S. power system since the 1930s. As recently as 2007, cheap coal accounted for more than half of U.S. net generation but has now plunged to 37% and is trending down. Some of this is due to the natural gas boom, but the EPA rule will finish the job.

Notably, these plant retirements may endanger the reliability of the electrical grid. This winter's cold snap showed that traditional power is essential to keeping the lights and heat on, and the risk of rolling blackouts is real as the EPA re-engineers the system.

The irony is that all the damage will do nothing for climate change. Based on the EPA's own carbon accounting, shutting down every coal-fired power plant tomorrow and replacing them with zero-carbon sources would reduce the Earth's temperature by about one-twentieth of a degree Fahrenheit in a hundred years.

Of the 32.6 billion metric tons of carbon the global economy threw off in 2011, the U.S. accounted for 5.5 billion. Mr. Obama's logic seems to be that the U.S. should first set a moral example by imposing costs that reduce our prosperity. This will then inspire China (8.7 billion tons), which produces and consumes nearly as much coal as the rest of the world combined, to do the same to its 300 million people who still live on pennies a day. Good luck persuading Xi Jinping.

The EPA's legal afflatus means that its carbon rule will be litigated for years, and we hope the states take the lead. As recently as Monday in *Bond v. U.S.* (see below), the Supreme Court held that the federal government can only make "a stark intrusion into traditional state authority" with "a clear statement of that purpose." The Congresses that passed the vague statutory language of the Clean Air Act and its 1990 amendments clearly never intended to endorse this EPA gambit.

In the American system, legislative inaction does not create a vacuum that the executive is entitled to fill. Almost all economic and human activity has some carbon cost, and the huge indirect tax and wealth redistribution scheme that the EPA is imposing by fiat will profoundly touch every American. Voters should at least have a say and know the price they will pay before ceding so much power to regulators.

June 3, 2014 Wall Street Journal, Review and Outlook Column

Desalination Plant Two-Thirds Complete, Delivering Water in 1 Year

The desalination plant under construction in Carlsbad is 65 percent complete and should begin water deliveries in about one year, the developer announced Wednesday.

The $1 billion project will produce 50 million gallons of water a day for use across the San Diego region, meeting about 7 percent of the county's need for water in 2020, and account for about one-third of locally generated water, according to Poseidon Water.

"As drought conditions deepen statewide, the value of the Carlsbad Desalination Project continues to grow for San Diego County," said Mark Weston, chairman of the San Diego County Water Authority's Board of Directors.

"But it's important to remember that the purpose of the Carlsbad Desalination Project isn't only to help during the current drought," he said. "It will be a core, high-quality water source for decades, and it is a key part of the water authority's strategy to improve the reliability of our region's water supply by diversifying our water resources."

About 7.25 miles of a 10-mile pipeline that will carry water from the plant to the water authority's distribution system has been completed.

Unlike San Luis Obispo County, in San Diego County the private sector, County, and water purveyors are actually doing something about bolstering water supply .

Coalition of Labor, Agriculture and Business
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All applications are subject to review and approval by the COLAB Membership Committee and Board of Directors.
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(Revised 1/2013)