



Wednesday, March 24th at 6:30

Democratic Club of West Orange County

Green Valley Community Center

17250 Los Jardines West, Fountain Valley

Taking Back Our Government and Making It Work For Us

Vern Nelson



Vern Nelson will give a presentation on the interlocking struggle for single payer health care and election reform, with a special emphasis on the June 4 "Fair Elections" ballot measure (Prop 15) and the drive to get "California Majority Rule" on November's ballot.

Vern has been a progressive, and sometime activist, since the age of 18, when he left his John-Birch Society Republican parents' home and discovered KPFFK and The Nation magazine.

Through the 80's and 90's, while pursuing his Bachelor and Master degrees in piano and musical composition, he lived in such liberal strongholds as Berkeley, Austin and

New Haven. It can make you complacent to be surrounded by too many likeminded people, and Vern finds it more satisfying to be back behind the Orange Curtain, where he can function as a sort of antibody inside the rightwing nuthouse.

And of course there was the utter horror of the Cheney-Bush years, which radicalized so many of us, Vern being no exception – and we will never get complacent again now that we've seen how bad things can get! Since 2004 or so, Vern has been very active in Democracy For America (DFA), founded the Orange County chapter of Health Care For All California, and organized & participated in many unforgettable anti-war events. Since 2008 he has been the token progressive blogger at the often obnoxious but rowdy and diverse Orange Juice Blog. ###

April Dynamic Democrat Submissions due on: Apr-7-2010

Individual Health Insurance Plans Subject to New Rules - Steph Campbell

Individual insurance policies are held by many who are unable to buy into a group plan. Premiums and deductibles are high; insurance companies try to rescind coverage or claim pre-existing conditions.

AB 2470 introduced by Hector De La Torre (D-50) will correct some of those problems. The bill requires the establishment of standard information and health history

questions to be used and that medical underwriting must be completed before issuing the policy. Policies could not be cancelled or rescinded unless certain conditions are met and insurers would have to annually report rescission and cancellation information which would be subject to a review process.

Similar bills have previously passed the Legislature but were vetoed by Schwarzenegger. ###

Treasurer's Report: Club Combined Account Balance: \$6,949.73

Talking Points—Rich Gillock

It used to be that during those awkward times with relatives or other social occasions where you did not dare bring up politics or religion, you could always talk about the weather. Not so much anymore. Your Republican friends are probably all mouthing the Rush Limbaugh talking points about the snow storms on the East Coast being a sign that “Global Warming” is a myth. They don’t seem so anxious to mention the lack of snow at the Vancouver Olympics due to the warmest winter on record there.

First of all, Climate Deniers do not rely upon any facts. They are “True Believers” and so they know the “truth” in spite of the evidence. They also can’t seem to differentiate “weather” from “climate.” Weather of course is what we experience each day locally. Hot, cold, wet, dry, windy, calm, those terms all describe weather. Climate is the local average of weather over vast regions and measured over decades.

So what about the snow storms in the East, and for that matter, the heavy rains locally? Well, we can blame it all on El Nino. In California we get virtually all of our weather from the Pacific Ocean which is also one of the big contributors to weather on the East Coast. A low pressure system over the Pacific generally moves South and East, and the leading edge of the low pressure system is a cold front. That’s what generates all of those thick clouds and the heavy rain. These Pacific storms generally get pushed across the United States by the jet stream, riding around the continental high pressure system. That’s how they manage to dump thousands of tons of the Pacific Ocean on Boston and New York. Since it is winter there, it comes down as snow.

El Nino is known for heavy rains, but why? Well what we call El Nino is just the warming of the Equatorial Pacific. Warmer water evaporates faster and warm air above it can hold more water vapor than cooler air. This means that the amount of precipitation is increased a lot. This year the El Nino warming was 0.5 to 1 degree C while between Catalina and the Channel Islands it was over 1.5 degree C warmer.

This may not sound like much, but when you remember from science class that it takes 1,000 calories of heat to raise the temperature of a liter of water by 1 degree C, you get to appreciate how much energy is stored in a big chunk of the Pacific Ocean when it warms up by a degree or so.

While we get more rain, Australia gets more drought and higher temperatures. El Nino is world wide.

And just because it snows in Washington D.C., doesn’t mean that the whole world is cooling off. In fact it is just the opposite. Without warmer Pacific waters, those snow storms would not have happened.

So we get startled when El Nino kicks up the weather patterns because of a small rise in ocean temperatures, but we haven’t seen anything yet! What El Nino does for local weather, Climate Change is doing for the entire planet. It is the same physics.

Our climate is dominated by ocean temperatures and they are on a steady rise, over 0.6 degrees C since 1960. Water has a high heat capacity, the ratio of heat absorbed to the rise in temperature, so a small temperature rise represents a large amount of stored energy. Air has a low heat capacity so it does whatever the water or land tells it to do. It takes very little of that stored energy to create massive storms in the atmosphere.

This is what Global Warming is all about. We are adding heat to our oceans, and our climate is changing. We know that CO₂ has increased in the atmosphere causing our climate to warm. But as the temperature of the air rises, so does the amount of water vapor in the air which is another green house gas. Then you look to the Arctic tundra which, as it melts due to increased temperatures, allows the release of Methane (CH₄) adding a more potent green-house gas to our atmosphere.

These processes are regenerative. As we get warmer, more gasses are generated in the atmosphere to hold that heat in. The greatest temperature rise is not the equatorial Pacific that causes El Nino, it is the Arctic and Antarctic. Some of the regenerative effects at the poles include the fact that as sea ice melts, the surface goes from about 5% absorption of heat to about 85%. Glaciers are melting at an alarming rate in Greenland and the Antarctic. The melt of Greenland alone can cause a sea level rise of over 20 ft, with an additional 70 ft or so from Antarctica. The 46th CD will become water world.

Yet nothing meaningful will come from this Congress on climate change because the public doesn’t understand the science. It is up to us to teach them because we may already be too late. ###

Message from the President—Jo Anne Jennings

Tea baggers seem to be featured in the news media on a regular basis. I can understand many of their feelings and frustrations. Too many have seen industries and good jobs disappear, people losing their homes, and incomes dropping while people on Wall Street make out like bandits. Naturally they worry about their future. Why then do tea baggers resist changes that would benefit them?

A presentation by Judith Lewis titled, [Spin: Your Brain on Politics](#), attempted to answer that question. Based on brain research, most of our thoughts originate in the amygdala and fall into four basic instinctual categories - fighting, fleeing, feeding and procreation. Rationality takes second place to these four instinctive reactions.

Research also shows that the brain is hard-wired to respond to stories. When confronted with policy versus stories, we will remember the stories first. Even then the memories we store will not remain static, they generally change over time. Our personal biases will affect our memories as well; the more emotional the experience the greater the impact on our memory.

In too many instances Republicans have been more effective than Democrats at messaging voters. Words like "death panels," "death taxes," and "9/11" are designed to

appeal to people's emotions. Constant repetition makes rational responses even more difficult. The hardest words Democrats have had to overcome are "Big government is not the solution, big government is the problem." People have been inundated with this message for 30 years and the tea baggers have an emotional belief in Reagan's statement.

I believe the best voice for the progressive message has been Michael Moore. You won't find one of his films on the Fox Network because they recognize his power of storytelling. President Obama asked for people to send their health care stories. In his speeches he'll share some of these stories but then he shifts to policy. Unfortunately, policy lacks the emotional ability to persuade people like the tea baggers.

Ms. Lewis shared an extensive list of books on the subject. Knowing I would never wade through so many books, I asked her if I read only one which would she recommend. She suggested I read [UnSpun: Finding Facts In A World Of Disinformation](#) by Brooks Jackson and Kathleen Hall Jamieson.

If you're interested in more information, I will gladly share her list with you. You can reach me at j.l.jennings1944@gmail.com.###

Do You Knit or Crochet? Are you a Quilter? Are You Looking For A Way To Volunteer From Home? — Steph Campbell

If you're housebound or just prefer to do some volunteer work from home that benefits the community, Project Linus might be just the thing for you. The mission of Project Linus is "to provide love, a sense of security, warmth and comfort to children who are seriously ill, traumatized, or otherwise in need through the gifts of new, handmade blankets and afghans, lovingly created by volunteer 'blanketeers.'"



The organization has been around for 15 years and so far they have distributed over 3 million blankets. The blankets go to children in hospitals, shelters, social service agencies or anywhere that a child is in need of a big hug.

There is a local chapter in Anaheim and they will pick up blankets that you've made and distribute them. They accept blankets in all sizes and styles and they can be as small as 36"x36" but a 40"x60" is preferred. Bright or pastel colors are preferred. These are given as gifts to children up to the age of 18. The blanket must be new, handmade and washable and they must have been made in a smoke-free environment due to allergy issues.

They have plenty of links on their web site for patterns for beginners all the way to those for the most experienced among us. If you prefer to just donate funds they are a 501(c)(3) and donations are tax deductible.

Their web site is: <http://www.projectlinus.org/index.html>

The Union of the Unemployed

The Unemployed Now Have Their Own Union, and It's Catching on Quickly

http://www.alternet.org/story/145797/the_unemployed_now_have_their_own_union%2C_and_it%27s_catching_on_quickly

It's been only a month that a union for the unemployed has come into existence through an ingenious grass-roots organizing campaign. In case you haven't heard about it, the union's name is "UR Union of the Unemployed" or its nickname, "UCubed," because of its unique method of organizing.

UCubed is the brain-child of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM), whose leaders feel that the millions of unemployed workers need a union of their own to join in the struggle for massive jobs programs.

The idea is that if millions of jobless join together and act as an organization, they are more likely to get Congress and the White House to provide the jobs that are urgently needed. They can also apply pressure for health insurance coverage, unemployment insurance and COBRA benefits and food stamps. An unemployed worker is virtually helpless if he or she has to act alone.

Joining a Cube is as simple as it is important. (Please check the union web site: www.unionofunemployed.com). Six people who live in the same zip code address can form a UCube. Nine such UCubes make a neighborhood. Three neighborhood UCubes form a power block that contains 162 activists. Politicians cannot easily ignore a multitude of power blocks, nor can merchants avoid them.

The union is built from the ground up. Cube activists will select their own leadership in each cube, neighborhood, block and higher group as well.

The UR Union of Unemployed (or UCubed) already has members in over 300 zip code addresses and 43 states, reports Rick Sloan, acting executive director of the union. Seventy-five cubes are up and running. For the first month, 19,998 people visited the site and viewed over 138,000 pages of content.

The union's Op-Ed article appeared in 62 newspapers, ranging from the "Black News" to the "Mexican American Sun," and from the "Las Vegas Tribune" to the "Senior Life of Northern Indiana." Total circulation exceeded 12 million readers.

UCubed put out three press releases last month, informing politicians in Washington that the union of unemployed will be watching--and reacting--to their vote on the latest job proposals of the Obama administration.

It is to the advantage of the AFL-CIO and Change to Win to encourage their unemployed members to participate in the UCubed organizing campaign. It is important for organized labor to display meaningful sympathy and solidarity with those who have been without a pay check for many months. A large union of unemployed workers can be an important ally in political campaigns and a source of legions of volunteers. When those unemployed workers finally get back to their jobs, we want them to have a favorable memory of how unions stood by their side.

Let's give the unemployed the support they need to be effective in their own defense. ###

Stimulus Worked - Jobs Created, Jobs Saved, Unemployment Lowered Congressional Budget Office Report

Up to 3.4 million people will be employed thanks to the stimulus program according to a new report released by the Congressional Budget Office (CBO). The stimulus cut between 0.6% to 1.5% off the unemployment rates during 2010. The gross domestic product (GDP) increased by at least 1.5% as a result of the stimulus.

There are people who claim that the stimulus didn't work and not enough jobs were created for the money spent. The reality is that the economy was a lot of worse off than

many people realized, and the stimulus dollars had to stretch further than planned to just get the results that were achieved.

This is documented in the CBO report released last month titled "Estimated Impact of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act on Employment and Economic Output from Oct-Dec 2009." The report is available on the CBO web site www.cbo.gov. ###

Mass Teacher Layoffs Loom Again For California Schools

By Robert Cruickshank

<http://www.californiaprogressreport.com/site/?q=node/7484>

This time last year, in the wake of the Legislature's decision to slash \$9 billion from the K-12 education budget, schools sent out nearly 30,000 layoff notices to teachers. In the end, most of those teachers were indeed laid off, though a significant number were rehired on one-year temporary contracts. Federal stimulus funds helped make that happen, but even so, the impact to schools was devastating. Class sizes have soared, some districts have closed entire schools (such as the elementary school three blocks from my apartment), and others have gone to a 4-day week.

With no renewal of federal stimulus funds for education in sight, and with the prospect of further education cuts at the state level, districts are gearing up again to make mass teacher layoffs. SF schools plan to fire 10% of their teachers and support staff:

District officials said the list is long given the mind-boggling \$113 million budget shortfall expected over the next two years, a deficit requiring huge cuts to staffing and programs. It includes full-time and part-time employees representing nearly 800 full-time teaching and administrative positions for the most part. It doesn't include such workers as clerks or school secretaries, who don't have to be notified by the deadline.

Sacramento area schools face similar cuts particularly in the absence of federal stimulus dollars:

Understandably, the federal stimulus money was a god-send to the districts. Elk Grove Unified - the area's largest district - used \$26 million of its \$39.5 million in stimulus funds to save the jobs of teachers, counselors, library technicians, vice principals and administrative assistants.

Officials from Sacramento City Unified spent about half of the district's \$43.3 million share to save jobs. The district spent another \$1.5 million to keep Mark Hopkins Elementary open for another year and nearly the entire balance to offset other budget reductions.

Twin Rivers Unified School District reported saving 109 teaching jobs with some of its \$19 million in stimulus funds. San Juan Unified School District spent at least \$19 million of its \$34.5 million to retain positions.

So far the Obama Administration has not yet moved to extend or even expand the education stimulus funds. And despite polling that shows Californians would pay higher taxes to avoid these cuts, so far nobody has yet come forward to propose following Oregon's lead and taxing the rich and large corporations in order to avoid the destruction of our schools.

The collapse of California's education system is going to generate more and more attention and activism over the coming year, as it hits a broad cross-section of California very hard. It therefore creates a political opportunity for progressives to act to restore our schools and ensure our children have a future in this state. ###

From Your Executive Board—Jo Anne Jennings

VP of Programs Resignation

The Executive Board regrets to inform the members of the resignation of Dr. Ben Miles, our 1st vice-president.

Ben has been an influential member who has arranged our interesting and informative meetings. Unfortunately, Ben has a class on Wednesday evenings and will no longer be able to serve. We will miss his presence and hard work finding inspiring speakers.

If you're interested in helping on programs please contact

Jo Anne at j.l.jennings1944@gmail.com

Voter Registration Has Begun

The club is beginning their registration drive for new voters in the June primary and general election in November. We will staff a table at Golden West College on March 8th and 13th. Then in April we'll be at Orange Coast College. The Strawberry Festival will be in May and we'll be registering voters in the Democratic Booth. Members interested in helping should contact Marko Markovich at makast@aol.com or phone him at 714-964-0748.

Upcoming Calendar of Interesting Events for Dems!

Mar 17 Noon-1:30	Democratic Foundation of Orange County Luncheon w/ Law Professor Marjorie Cohn The Center Club, 650 Town Center Drive, Costa Mesa. Marjorie Cohn is a professor at Thomas Jefferson School of Law and immediate past president of the National Lawyers Guild. She is the author of Cowboy Republic: Six Ways the Bush Gang Has Defied the Law. Her newest book is Rules of Disengagement: The Politics and Honor of Military Dissent. There is no charge for DFOC Members. Non-DFOC Member Tickets are \$45 each. Please RSVP at jkurpies@dfoc.com .
Mar 20 9:00-11:30 am	Green Candidates Academy A seminar for local Orange County candidates who are incorporating environmental issues into their campaigns. Irvine Ranch Water District 15600 Sand Canyon Ave, Irvine. The Green Candidates' Academy is co-hosted by the Orange County League of Conservation Voters and the Orange County Sierra Club Political Committee. Both non-partisan organizations endorse candidates in local races and the OCLCV also functions as a PAC which contributes to local candidate. This workshop is free and open to potential and registered candidates running for local offices in Orange County , campaign workers and other individuals. To RSVP please email gusayer@gmail.com . For more information call Gus Ayer at 714-209-8365.
Mar 20 2:00 pm	Americans United for Separation of Church and State. Hugh Hewitt and William Lobdell will debate the issues surrounding the intersection of media, politics and religion. Irvine Ranch Water District, 15600 Sand Canyon Ave., Irvine www.au-oc.org or call 714-299-4551 for information.
Mar 22 7:00 pm	Orange County Central Committee. All Democrats are welcome. Carpenter's Hall, 1816 W. Chapman Avenue, Orange.
Mar 24 6:30 pm	Democratic Club of West Orange County—Meeting—See Page 1 for details
Apr 10 9:30 am	Great American Write-In Lakeview Senior Center - Woodbridge Community Park - 20 Lake Road, Irvine . For Information Ruth Gluck 949-581-3938 or Felicity Figueroa 949- 733-0850
Apr 14 7:00 pm	Next meeting of the 67th Area Wide Democratic Alliance ; International Association of Machinists Hall, 5402 Bolsa Avenue, Huntington Beach. For more details see http://www.67thad.com .
Apr 18-20	California Democratic Party State Convention—Los Angeles Convention Center Visit www.cadem.org for more information
Apr 19 7:00 pm	Next meeting of the 68th Assembly District Committee . Contact them via their web site for additional information at http://www.68thad.com/contact.asp . Carrows, 16931 Magnolia Ave., Huntington Beach

Next E-Board Meeting
Tuesday, April 6th at 7:00 pm
Pauline Younkin's Home
10960 El Domino, Fountain Valley
Call Jo Anne at 714-846-5201 or Pauline at 714-589-1211 for information

Remembering John Murtha—Steph Campbell



Rep. John Murtha (D-Pa.), 77, a Vietnam veteran who staunchly supported military spending and became a master of pork-barrel politics, died last month following gall bladder surgery.

Elected to Congress in 1974 from a southwestern Pennsylvania district that has been economically devastated by the decline of America's coal-mining and steel industries, the gruff and jowly Murtha was beloved by his constituents for tapping billions of dollars in federal funds to seed new industries there.

He was revered among Democrats -- and even some Republicans -- for his skill over 19 terms in using the power of the federal purse to make kings and deals. A right-hand man of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, he was considered one of the most influential lawmakers on Capitol Hill and credited with her ascension.

The former Marine became a mentor to lawmakers trying to learn how to work Washington's power levers but also a symbol of the controversial congressional "earmarking."

In that process, lawmakers can add federal funds to the budget to give no-bid contracts to pet projects and companies of their choosing. Murtha faced a drumbeat of questions about possible ethical conflicts in his earmarks, as executives and lobbyists for the firms receiving the earmarks were among his most generous campaign contributors.

John Patrick Murtha Jr. was born June 17, 1932, in New Martinsville, W.Va., and raised in Westmoreland County, Pa. He long credited the resilient women in his family, including his mother, as key to his success in life. His father, an alcoholic, died early.

Back from Vietnam, Murtha was recruited by the local Democratic Party to challenge longtime member of Congress John P. Saylor (R) and presented himself as hawkish on military affairs. "To me, it is academic whether we should be in Vietnam," the young veteran said at the time. "Our men are fighting their hearts out so we can sit at home and enjoy the luxuries of this great nation. We have to unite." He lost the race but won election to the Pennsylvania House of Representatives. When Saylor died in office, Murtha won a special election to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1974. In a District that had been Republican territory until the arrival of the New Deal, Murtha's victory was taken in part as a rejection of then-President Richard M. Nixon. His slogan: "One honest man can make a difference." ###

Thank You Patrons!

Sally Alexander	Paul & Arlene Flanagan	James Karis	Eileen Ringerman
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Ron Wyden Blocking Extensions to Bills Until Senate Extends Unemployment and COBRA Benefits—Steph Campbell

Democratic Senator Wyden (Oregon) has indicated that he will prevent the Senate from extending any expiring bill until it extends unemployment benefits and the subsidized health insurance benefits (COBRA). This is taking a page from the Republican play book—and it's about time!

This is in response to Senator Bunning (R-Ky) who is blocking the extensions.

Here's what was reported in the Huffington Post last month: (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/02/26/ron-wyden-to-block-other_n_478521.html)

Wyden is outraged. "Denying [the unemployed] legislation that helps them pay for the basic necessities of life is fundamentally wrong," Wyden told HuffPost. "For people that are getting hammered in this economy, trying literally to figure out from their kitchen table and their living rooms how they're going to get by, this legislation is a lifeline."

Senate Democrats had been pushing a stopgap measure that would extend by 30 days the eligibility deadline for

enhanced unemployment benefits and subsidized COBRA health insurance. The stimulus bill provided the subsidy and more than 50 extra weeks of federally-funded benefits for laid-off workers. But after Feb. 28 laid-off workers will be ineligible for the additional "tiers" of benefits. State workforce agencies have already sent out letters telling some benefits recipients that they will be ineligible for the extra benefits.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) and Majority Whip Dick Durbin (D-Ill.) pleaded with Bunning to let the bill proceed to a vote, arguing that letting the benefits expire would wreak havoc on unemployed families and the economic recovery. Bunning wants to fund the extension with unused stimulus money.

Now Wyden is fighting back with the same much-maligned parliamentary tactic Bunning is using. "It's awful that you have to do this," he said. "I am the ringleader of the effort to blow the whistle on outdated secret procedures." ###

Membership Application Democratic Club of West Orange County

Your name, address, occupation and employer is required by Federal & California Law for all cash donations \$25 or greater. \$100 or greater donations must be by check only.

Date	\$	Donation	<input type="checkbox"/>	Patron	\$60
			<input type="checkbox"/>	Family	\$40
Name			<input type="checkbox"/>	Individual	\$25
Address			<input type="checkbox"/>	Senior-Student	\$20
City, ZIP			Select your newsletter preference:		
			<input type="checkbox"/>	Newsletter by USPS	
Phone			<input type="checkbox"/>	Newsletter by E-mail	
Email			Make your check payable to: DCWOC		
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Occupation (Self Employed is not an Occupation)			DCWOC		
			Attn: Treasurer		
			2781 W. MacArthur Blvd., #B-Box 347		
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The Hard Road Ahead—Kevin Drum

<http://motherjones.com/kevin-drum>

The path forward for healthcare reform is now widely agreed on: pass the existing Senate bill through the House, and then tack on a package of changes negotiated between the House and Senate that can be passed through both chambers on a simple majority vote via the budget reconciliation process. Simple. Except for one thing: who goes first, and what gets passed when? Michael Scherer outlines the process:

The Senate does not want to go first because Republicans will be able to bottle up the reconciliation process, delaying the vote and making for another ugly sausage making spectacle that Americans hate to watch. If reconciliation takes too long, the thinking goes, then the House will never act, and the whole health care deal will die. But if the House goes first by passing the Senate bill, and the president signs it, then the incentive for Republicans to bottle up reconciliation would be diminished. Health care reform would, at that point, already be law. The horse would be out of the barn. Republicans would then be obstructing fixes to the law that would make the bill, arguably, better by getting rid of stuff like the "cornhusker kick-back," a much tougher proposition.

Here is where it gets tricky: The House is not going to vote on the Senate bill (even with a separate package of amendments to match the Senate's reconciliation) until it is dead certain that the Senate will act. So how could those assurances be arranged? With the help of C-Span cameras, of course, or perhaps a letter from 51 Democrats vowing to pass reconciliation come hell or high water. Once the letter is read on the nightly news, the House can act, and

suddenly the pressure would be on the Senate Republicans. With health care already law, the GOP will have to decide whether or not to spend weeks gumming up the Senate to delay some amendments to that bill.

Without a doubt, the whole thing is a long shot. It's not clear that Pelosi has the votes she needs, but if she can get to 217, then it is unlikely to be all that difficult to get the Senate to 51, despite Republican carping over process. There is a path. It's tiny. But it's there.

Of course, Scherer has skipped a step here: coming up with the reconciliation compromise in the first place. It has to be something that can still get 51 votes in the Senate — which probably isn't too hard — and a majority in the House. And since abortion language can't be changed via reconciliation (it has nothing to do with the budget), that means the House majority has to suck it up and accept the Senate's abortion language. Considering that the Senate language is pretty stiff, that shouldn't be too hard, but if anti-abortion Dems are casting around for an excuse to vote No anyway, that would be a pretty handy one.

Anyway, I keep reading that the House and Senate hate each other's guts these days, which is going to make this whole process difficult. That seems crazy to me, since you'd think a bunch of professional politicians would have a pretty hard-boiled view of the institutional issues that affect both chambers. But in the same way that inter-party relationships have gotten far more personal and vitriolic since the Gingrich revolution, apparently so have intra-party relationships. Obama's got his work cut out for him.

Ballot Experiment in California —Kevin Drum

<http://motherjones.com/kevin-drum>

There's an interesting initiative on the California ballot this June. It's called the California Fair Elections Act, and it's an attempt to get voters to approve public funding of statewide campaign

But that's not why it's interesting. Public campaign funding is hardly a fresh idea after all. The basic idea behind Proposition 15 isn't that fresh, either. In a nutshell, it would require all state-registered lobbyists to pay an an-

nual fee of \$350, which supporters estimate would raise about \$2 million per year. (This is a funding mechanism that, if not interesting, is certainly cheeky: The idea of making lobbyists pay the bill for a system that would undermine the influence of lobbyists is, at the very least, sort of a delicious irony.)

Candidates who want access to this money would first

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have to raise five dollars from at least 7,500 registered voters. Candidates who do this would receive enough money from the CFEA fund to run a statewide campaign, but only if they agree not to raise money from any other source. This is designed to eliminate the need to raise money from special interests, and it's similar to public funding laws passed in other states, including Arizona.

But that's still not why I find Proposition 15 sort of fascinating. What's new and different about it is that it's basically a beta test. It applies only to one office—secretary of state—and only to the elections in 2014 and 2018. On January 1 of the following year, it automatically disap-

pears for good unless voters decide they like it and want to extend it.

I'm generally not a fan of ballot initiatives. They tend to be badly written, they've long since been captured by wealthy corporate interests, and they routinely expend money that doesn't exist. Proposition 15 falls into none of those traps, but what really makes it appealing to me is that I like the idea of short-term experiments. If Prop 15 fails, not much harm is done. If it works, it will have proven itself in the toughest arena of all: real life. It's a small-bore way of allowing voters to find out if they like the idea before committing themselves to a sweeping and permanent change. We could use more initiatives like this. ###

What's Going on With Judicial Nominations – Or – What Is That Grand Obstructionist Party Doing? - Steph Campbell



There are currently seven circuit court nominees awaiting a final confirmation vote:

Jane Stranch (Sixth Circuit) and Thomas Vanaskie (Third Circuit). They were both nominated on August 6, 2009: and their nominations have been pending 204 days.

Barbara Keenan of the Fourth Circuit was nominated on September 14, 2009 and her nomination has been pending 165 days.

Denny Chin of the Second Circuit was nominated on October 6, 2009 and his nomination has been pending 143 days.

Albert Diaz and James Wynn both of the Fourth Circuit were nominated on November 4, 2009 and their nominations have been pending 114 days.

As of February 26th there were 125 Current and Future Vacancies in the Courts. "Future" vacancies are those for which a judge has notified the president that he/she will leave active service on a specified upcoming date). Here are the vacancies:

... 20 Court of Appeals Vacancies

- ... 83 District Court Vacancies
- ... 4 Court of Appeals Vacancies
- ... 18 District Court Vacancies

Currently there are 32 Nominees pending. 18 of these are nominees pending in the Judiciary Committee and the remainder are pending on the Senate Floor.

Since President Obama took office there have been just 16 judicial confirmations. One of which is Sonia Sotomayor and there have been 5 confirmations in the Circuit Court of Appeals and 10 in District Court.

Federal judiciary appointees serve for life and their choice is critical to the mark that Obama will leave on the nation. The rightwing imprint left by Bush has to be balanced by Obama nominees—but they have to get confirmed. A difficult proposition when you consider that earlier this year a letter was signed by every Republican senator warning that they would filibuster any nominee from their home states if they did not approve the choice **in advance**. Contrast this with the fact that during the Bush years only a select few of his nominees were filibustered—in fact what's outrageous about the Bush years is to look at those nominees who were approved. Jay Bybee, for example, who was the author of some of the torture memos and is now on the 9th Circuit. ###

Class Action Lawsuit Filed Against CA Anti-Affirmative Action Measure

Associated Press 2/17/10; Feminist Daily Newswire 4/27/09, 2/17/10

<http://www.feminist.org/news/newsbyte/uswirestory.asp?id=12235>

A class action lawsuit was filed in February that alleges that the civil rights of Black, Latina/o, and Native American applicants to California schools are violated due to an amendment, Proposition 209, to the state constitution. The Proposition 209 amendment to the California constitution passed in 1996 and prohibits affirmative action in public employment, education, and contracting. The so-called California Civil Rights Initiative effectively ended affirmative action policies in the state and gutted sex discrimination law.

The suit, which claims that Proposition 209 is unconstitutional because it violates the equal protection clause of the Constitution was filed by Michigan-based group By Any Means Necessary. Lead counsel Shanta Driver told the Associated Press, "Thirteen years of a ban on affirmative action in the state of California has left, in particular UCLA and Berkeley, with just pitifully low numbers of black and Latino students...You can't have a white majority create a situation in which the only people who are barred from going to their regents and saying, 'Adjust the admissions system so more of our sons and daughters can get in' are black, Latino and Native American."

California Attorney General Jerry Brown wrote a letter to the California state Supreme Court last year arguing that

the amendment is unconstitutional because it violates the Equal Protection Clause. The letter also states that "ironically, by effectively disadvantaging racial minorities and women in the political process, without an evident compelling governmental reason for doing so, [the amendment] seems to accomplish the very evil it purported to eliminate...racial and gender discrimination." Brown wrote the letter at the request of the California state Supreme Court, which was then considering a challenge to a law that gives an advantage to women and minority-owned businesses in bidding for contracts in San Francisco.

Ward Connerly, a California businessman, used the passage of Proposition 209 to build his nationwide campaign against affirmative action. Connerly's efforts have led to affirmative action bans not only in California, but also in Michigan, Washington, and Nebraska. A similar affirmative action ban supported by Connerly was defeated in Colorado in 2008. Also in 2008, Connerly's anti-affirmative action campaigns in Missouri, Oklahoma, and Arizona failed to gather enough signatures for measures to qualify for the ballot. Connerly testified last month in support of a bill in the Utah state Senate that would ban affirmative action in the state. ###

Unemployment Insurance Borrowing Now Greater Than During the 1980s Recession — Steph Campbell

Here's what it says on the web site www.propublica.org: "It's official, recession hounds: The 26 states with insolvent unemployment insurance trust funds have now borrowed more than was borrowed during 1981 and 1982, the last time there was a severe recession in the U.S., and an oft-used benchmark for when things are *Officially Really Bad*."

How does California stack up? In a word "badly." As of December we had borrowed \$7 billion. Our unemployment rate was 12.4% compared to the national average of 9.7%. The income in our unemployment fund ranked at the bottom of all the states. Our average weekly benefit to unemployed workers is \$317.60. And yet only 40 percent

of unemployed in California are receiving benefits—that puts us 36th out of 51.

Overall the borrowing of all the states is just over \$30 billion with some unemployment insurance funds declaring themselves insolvent, such as the state of Arizona.

In 1983 states were borrowing at a rate about equal to 3 percent of total wages. Today the borrowing is at 2.4 percent. But California is expected to borrow another \$11 billion before the recession is over. Part of the problem (a big part) is how much of workers' earnings are taxed for unemployment. In 1981 42 percent of eligible earnings were taxed; in 2008 that figure dropped to 27 percent. When will government "get" the fact that taxes need to be raised?

Reaffirming Out National Values: President Obama's Meeting with the Dalai Lama—Winnie Chen of Center for American Progress

www.americanprogress.org



President Obama's meeting with the Dalai Lama this week should put to rest some questions about his administration's commitment to human rights in China. The meeting, which happened amid a tense period in the U.S.-China relationship, is a welcome symbol of the Obama administration's dedication to keep human rights on an ever more crowded—and challenging—bilateral agenda.

The meeting with the Dalai Lama added to a growing litany of disagreements currently troubling the U.S.-China relations, including trade imbalances, the recently announced Taiwan arms deal, Internet censorship, and Iran. China reacted predictably to the White House meeting, stating, "China is firmly opposed to Dalai's visit to the U.S. and his contact with the U.S. leadership. Our position is consistent and unequivocal."

A number of follow-up statements also argued that the meeting would invariably hurt U.S.-China relations. Yet disagreements over meeting with the Dalai Lama are not new. Since 1990, every American president from George H. W. Bush to Bill Clinton and George W. Bush has met the Dalai Lama, often multiple times. In each instance, the Chinese government responded in a similar manner.

President Clinton's "drop by" sessions with the Dalai Lama in 1995 and 1997 were met with this statement from the Chinese: "We are strongly dissatisfied with the United States for allowing the Dalai Lama to carry out splittist activities in the United States, and with U.S. leaders for meeting with him." And when President George W. Bush was present at the televised awarding of the Congressional Gold Medal to the Dalai Lama in 2007, the Chinese government called the event a "farce."

Given this history, any other reaction by the Chinese government to the meeting on Thursday would be considered uncharacteristic. But what is different this time is that the issues of Tibet and the Dalai Lama re-emerge at a particularly sensitive moment for China. Between the United States' most recent arms deal with Taiwan, growing international concern about a slew of arbitrary detention of

human rights activists, and growing unease of widespread oppression of Tibetan and Uighur activists, the Chinese government is especially sensitive to moves it deems threatening to its sovereignty. This acute sensitivity may explain the harsher statements coming from Beijing recently.

President Obama is aware of this and has followed precedents set by his predecessors, making clear that he recognizes Tibet as a part of China and would meet with the Dalai Lama as a spiritual leader. But President Obama also made clear in word and deed that his administration supports the "preservation of Tibet's unique religious, cultural and linguistic identity and the protection of human rights for Tibetans in the People's Republic of China" and will speak out when China unjustly imprisons human rights activists in China, among them most recently Liu Xiaobo. The meeting's greatest message was that that America will always champion human rights, democracy, and religious freedom around the world.

Thursday's meeting is emblematic of these commitments and an important symbol of America's moral leadership on issues of human freedom. But the hardest part—advancing human rights in China—comes after the meeting. China's human rights conditions have deteriorated significantly over the past couple of years, with greater restrictions on online activities, human rights lawyers and activists, ethnic minorities, and migrant workers.

Unfortunately, America's track record in persuading China to improve its human rights has been tepid at best, and it looks to grow more difficult in light of the growing number of issues on which the United States and China must cooperate. But, as outlined in CAP's report on advancing human rights in China, there are a number of ways that the administration can pursue a productive human rights agenda in China. At the heart of the list is "ignore the rhetoric, don't be distracted, and never give up." And that is exactly what President Obama accomplished yesterday.

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Congress Reauthorizes the Patriot Act and Sidesteps Privacy Concerns

<http://www.truthout.org/congress-reauthorizes-patriot-act-sidesteps-privacy-concerns57244>

Under pressure from the White House and Republicans, a bill to extend three key provisions of the Patriot Act was passed by the House Thursday with little discussion or debate and sent to President Obama, who is expected to sign it.

The bill passed with an overwhelming majority, 315-97, and will allow law enforcement and intelligence officials to continue to compel private businesses to turn over records; track non-government entities, such as terrorist organizations; and use so-called “roving wiretaps,” which can be set up regardless of whether the line being tapped is sometimes used for legitimate purposes.

Both chambers passed the measure swiftly after Democrats agreed to drop greater restrictions and oversight on domestic spying programs.

“I would have preferred to add oversight and judicial review improvements to any extension of expiring provisions in the USA PATRIOT Act,” said Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vermont) in a statement.

The Democrats, facing a looming deadline and a potential filibuster in the Senate, backed away from many key provisions concerning congressional oversight in what is seen by critics as a blow to both the party and civil liberties.

In the House, only a few Congressmen, including Jerrold Nadler (D-New York) and Dennis Kucinich (D-Ohio) came out in public opposition to the bill.

“As Members of Congress sworn to protect the rights and civil liberties afforded to us by the Constitution, we have a responsibility to exercise our oversight powers fully, and significantly reform the PATRIOT Act, ensuring that the privacy and civil liberties of all Americans are fully protected,” Kucinich said in a statement. “More than eight years after the passage of the PATRIOT Act, we have failed to do so.”

Leahy introduced the legislation in November, and it follows further revelations of domestic wiretapping that took place during the Bush Administration, including a January report from the Department of Justice’s Office of the Inspector General on the FBI’s use of “exigent letters” to obtain phone records without judicial oversight or a subpoena.

After high-level officials in the FBI and White House discovered the practice in 2006, they issued 11 National Security Letters - an administrative subpoena demanding that an organization turn over data about an individual - in an attempt to “try to ‘cover’ or validate the improperly obtained records,” according to the report.

Eric Holder in a letter to Leahy expressing his “strong support” of the Patriot Act Extension, wrote that NSLs, “remain a critical tool of national security investigations.”

“These letters, issued with no court oversight, have been used to obtain all sorts of material, and have been joined with gag orders on the recipients that were recently struck down by the courts,” Nadler said. “I hope that this vote today will not stop my colleagues from continuing to improve our intelligence gathering laws.”

Sen. Dick Durbin (D-Illinois) attempted to add an amendment to the bill that would have reformed the way NSLs can be used. Senators Russ Feingold (D-Wisconsin) and Arlen Specter (D-Pennsylvania) were unsuccessful in adding an amendment to not reauthorize the so-called “lone wolf” power, which permits surveillance of targets with no ties to foreign powers.

Feingold was, however, able to add an amendment that would limit the records the government can keep while using NSLs. He was also the only Senator to vote against the original Patriot Act legislation passed in 2001.

Both the House and the Senate are working on bills that would extend and reform the Patriot Act, but remain at an impasse on which powers the government should be able to retain, and how to oversee how those powers are being exercised.

The House version of the bill would eliminate the “lone wolf” power, while the Senate would simply reauthorize existing authorities. The bills, both of which passed through committee and await floor action, contain significant oversight of these powers. Democratic lawmakers could now potentially push action on the bill until after the midterm elections in what has already proven to be a costly battle on national security.

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