

Pesticide Use Threatens Health in California

President Trump boasts about all the regulations that he has eliminated but he never mentions the important good that many of these rules were doing, as Dennis J Bernstein explains.

By Dennis J Bernstein

The battle to protect farmworkers and their families from dangerous pesticides has been going on for decades. But it has always been an uphill struggle because of the power and the money behind the mammoth petrochemical industry. In 2017, farmworkers, their families continued to be exposed to toxic sprays that drift into school zones and other populated areas.

While there have been some improvements and restrictions at the California state level, experts and activists in the field say not nearly enough is being done. And compounding the problem, EPA Director Scott Pruitt took swift action against new regulations that were about to be put into place under President Obama

Dr. Ann Lopez, Director of the Center for Farmworker Families, based in Felton, California, has taught courses in biology, environmental science, ecology and botany in the biology department at San José City College for many years. She is an independent researcher whose research addresses the human side of the binational migration circuit from the subsistence and small producer farms of west central Mexico to employment in California's corporate agribusiness.

Dr. Lopez has worked with over 33 farmworker families in the Salinas and Pajaro valleys. She has also studied 22 of their family farms in the west central Mexico countryside, and has received recognition and awards for her work.

Dr. Lopez, author of *The Farmworkers Journey*, was awarded the Human Agenda Ecological Sustainability Award in 2014 and the Community Action Board of Santa Cruz County, Inc. awarded her with the Community Game Changer Award in 2015.

I spoke to Dr. Lopez on Dec. 27, 2017 at her office in Felton, California.

Dennis Bernstein: We know that the struggle against pesticide use continues.

For so many years the farmworkers have been on the front line. What can we say at this point about these dangerous pesticides that are poisoning so many farmworkers and their families?

Ann Lopez: There has been some progress, especially pertaining to chlorpyrifos, a developmental neurotoxin. But we still have a long way to go.

I am very concerned about Roundup (glyphosate), which has been determined to be a Proposition 65 carcinogen. Monsanto does not have to label it as a carcinogen until well into 2018, which means that anyone who buys it thinking it is safe literally risks his or her life. Just mere exposure puts you at high risk, particularly for non-Hodgkin lymphoma and a variety of other horrible diseases, including blood cancers.

I personally know of three people who have died as a result of exposure, they believed, to Roundup. Yet this is sold in any hardware store as if it were nothing harmful. It speaks to the neoliberal economy, where profits are much more important than people or the environment.

Dennis Bernstein: There have been struggles around other chemicals and concern about spraying near schools.

Ann Lopez: Fortunately, the Pajaro Valley school district has gotten rid of Roundup spraying. This is one of my lead concerns because the entire public is put at risk with this and most people are unaware that this chemical can kill them!

Chlorpyrifos is a developmental neurotoxin derived from a nerve gas used in World War II which is primarily active on the brain and spinal cords of young children. This chemical was banned for residential use in 2000 but is still used in agriculture. So that is the front line for struggle today.

I have a PhD in environmental science and I have never read of a worse case of environmental racism than what I have studied in the Salinas Valley. First of all, organophosphates are very detrimental to developing fetuses. UC Berkeley scientists did a seventeen-year study of mothers and children in the Salinas Valley and found a direct correlation between a pregnant woman's exposure to organophosphates and resulting brain damage to the child. For every 522 pounds of exposure within a kilometer of where the mother resides, the child, by the time it reaches age seven, will have lost 2.2 points of IQ.

If you go online, you can see where the spraying occurs. There are whole residential areas filled with people where this concentration occurs continuously. Once these children grow up, they are intellectually deficient. They go to schools surrounding these fields where they use this developmental neurotoxin chlorpyrifos as an insecticide. Chlorpyrifos is drift-prone so once it is sprayed it moves through the air and into the classrooms, and it interferes with normal development of the brain and spinal cord.

So these children are impacted on two fronts, prenatally and then during their primary school years. The vast majority of these children, something like 90%,

are Latino. I find it hard to believe that this would ever go on in a white neighborhood. It would simply not be tolerated.

Prior to the Trump administration, the EPA banned chlorpyrifos nationwide and then Scott Pruitt, the new director, had a conversation with DOW executives and reversed the ban. So right now we are trying to get it banned at least in the state of California.

A couple months ago, we went to the EPA office and met with one of their committees, the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment. DOW executives gave their position and then those of us who came from all over the state to address this issue gave our statement, and they voted 8-2 in our favor. This means that chlorpyrifos is now listed as a Prop. 65 developmental neurotoxin, so we at least have that labeling on the containers.

But this past year has been a travesty for farmworkers. Thirty-four workers in Bakersfield were hospitalized because of exposure to chlorpyrifos and then another 17 in central California.

Dennis Bernstein: This can involve a whole series of treatments and then you have to worry about the long-term damage.

Ann Lopez: Absolutely, there is the issue of chronic exposure.

Dennis Bernstein: Could you describe the suffering that's involved? What are the symptoms like?

Ann Lopez: They become very weak, very nauseous, some even collapse out in the fields. The ones I worry about most are the children, who face permanent brain and spinal cord damage. I have studied farmworker issues for many years now and every parent I have spoken with wanted their children educated and to have a better life out of farm work. What are the chances for children to succeed academically and move on when their brains don't develop normally? We have a program called Safe Ag Safe Schools and we are partnered with Californians for Pesticide Reform.

Dennis Bernstein: These pesticides were created by companies that began working for the US defense industries making toxins to kill people. What we are seeing here is an attempt to mainstream the industry into everyday life.

Ann Lopez: Whenever I meet with Mark Weller, Co-Director at Californians for Pesticide Reform, I ask him, "Has World War II ended yet?" We are still using these horrific chemicals and continue to spray million of pounds of this poison all over the planet, all in the name of profit.

We had a press conference in Salinas on March 31, 2017 and I remember asking at the end of my talk, “Are your profits really worth the compromised brains of our children?” You can ask the same thing about the biosphere, and so on. At what point do we stop destroying the very planet that supports our existence?

These chemicals play a crucial role in all this. I don’t think there is any excuse for using them. Studies have long shown that if we converted to an all-organic, regenerative agriculture tomorrow, we could feed every human being on the planet and mitigate climate change by 30-40 percent.

So the question becomes, why aren’t we doing that? The only reason is to keep these outdated industries in operation which are basically destroying the planet and all of its life-forms. Personally, I find it unethical and reprehensible, and it can only happen when the public is kept uninformed.

Dennis J Bernstein is a host of “Flashpoints” on the Pacifica radio network and the author of Special Ed: Voices from a Hidden Classroom. You can access the audio archives at www.flashpoints.net.

How Trump Fixes Facts Around Policy

President Trump’s disdain for inconvenient truth has led to the deletion of climate science from the EPA’s web site and other moves to fix the facts around his policies, notes ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

Many of us have had more than our fill of the 100-day assessments of Donald Trump’s presidency. Besides the arbitrary nature of this point on the calendar, and besides the sheer overload of the number of attempts at such a first-quarter report card, most of what gets put on such cards does not get at what is most important in evaluating any presidency.

Heavy emphasis gets placed on legislative acts. Although an ability to work with Congress is one attribute we like to see in a president, it is only one and hardly the most important one. Besides, the reasons for lack of legislative accomplishment are apt to be found less in the White House than in obduracy and dysfunction in whoever has majority control at the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue.

The artificial reporting period encourages not only silly claims about

accomplishments but also an incentive to give the impression of motion and progress even when substance is lacking. The Trump White House certainly has been no exception to this pattern.

There has been, for example, the counting as an “accomplishment” the appointment and confirmation this early in the presidential term of a Supreme Court justice – without mentioning, of course, that this event was the direct result of the Republican majority in the Senate refusing for a year even to consider the previous president’s nominee (and then expanding the “nuclear option” to shove through Trump’s nominee). Also added to the count are executive orders that only undo something that President Obama did, or, in many cases, that order a cabinet secretary to study how something that Obama did could be undone.

Reading Trump

It’s not just the White House and its supporters who have indulged in the 100-day excesses. There has been much over-analysis, sometimes tinged with either hope or worry, depending on the analyst’s policy preferences, that attempts to discern larger substance and implications from individual actions or exclamations from Trump. Such attempts to extrapolate doctrine and direction from this inconsistent presidency are mostly a blood-from-a-turnip exercise.

Some lessons can indeed be drawn from the first 100 days, but with Trump the lessons are less a matter of either doctrine or accomplishment than of whether the habits, and the character and ability or lack thereof, that Trump exhibited during the campaign and in his earlier business career are continuing while he is office.

One of the best summary observations in this regard is from *Washington Post* columnist Steven Pearlstein, who writes on business and financial matters but whose conclusions could apply as well to Trump’s handling of a wide range of foreign and domestic matters:

“What we know, first and foremost, is that it hardly matters what Trump says because what he says is as likely as not to have no relationship to the truth, no relationship to what he said last year during the campaign or even what he said last week. What he says bears no relationship to any consistent political or policy ideology or world-view. What he says is also likely to bear no relationship to what his top advisers or appointees have said or believe, making them unreliable interlocutors even if they agreed among themselves, which they don’t.

“This lack of clear policy is compounded by the fact that the president, despite his boasts to the contrary, knows very little about the topics at hand and isn’t

particularly interested in learning. In other words, he's still making it up as he goes along."

Reasons to Worry

Many elements of dismay can follow from the fact of having this kind of president. We are apt to get a better idea of which specific things are most worthy of dismay as the rest of this presidency unfolds. I suggest, however, that a prime, overarching reason to worry is Trump's utter disregard for the truth. Not just a disregard, actually, but a determination to crush the truth and to instill falsehood in the minds of as many people as possible.

The *Post's* fact checker, Glenn Kessler, summarizes the situation by noting that "the pace and volume of the president's misstatements" are so great that he and other fact checkers "cannot possibly keep up." Kessler also observes how Trump's handling of falsehoods is qualitatively as well as quantitatively different from the garden variety of lying in which many politicians indulge: "Many will drop a false claim after it has been deemed false. But Trump just repeats the claim over and over."

It is a technique reminiscent of the Big Lie that totalitarian regimes have used, in which the repetition and brazenness of a lie help lead to its acceptance. The problem is fundamental, and relates to a broad spectrum of policy issues both foreign and domestic, because truth – factual reality – is a necessary foundation to consider and evaluate and debate policy on any subject.

Crushing the truth means not just our having to endure any one misdirected policy; it means losing the ability even to address policy intelligently. To the extent that falsehood is successfully instilled in the minds of enough people, the political system loses what would otherwise be its ability to provide a check on policy that is bad policy because it is inconsistent with factual reality.

Ignoring Climate Science

One hundred days is enough time for the Trumpian assault on truth to start to become institutionalized. The process has become plain at the website of the Environmental Protection Agency. Changes at the website since Trump's inauguration include not only what would be expected after a change of administrations in keeping any policy statements consistent with the new regime's preferences; it also has involved expunging the truth.

Specifically, a section of the site that had existed for 20 years and provided detailed data and scientific information on climate change has been removed. The deleted site, according to climate scientist Katharine Hayhoe of Texas Tech

University, included “important summaries of climate science and indicators that clearly and unmistakably explain and document the impacts we are having on our planet.”

The site was a go-to place for authoritative information about climate change. This is the sort of service one should expect to get from a government agency such as EPA (just like, before I took some recent foreign travel, the website of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention served as a go-to site for authoritative information about what inoculations I would need). Now that part of the EPA site is gone.

EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt approved the deletion because, according to an anonymous staffer under Pruitt, “we can’t have information which contradicts the actions we have taken in the last two months.”

So instead of defending those actions in a well-informed policy debate based on truth, the administration’s approach was to delete the truth. If the policy doesn’t conform with reality, then deny the reality and make it as hard as possible for citizens to be informed of the reality.

Orwell’s Ministry of Truth may be closer than we thought.

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Behind Flint’s Lead-Poisoned Water

Largely abandoned by auto manufacturers who shifted factories to low-wage areas, Flint, Michigan, suffers from a powerlessness that allowed Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder and other officials to ignore the city’s lead-poisoned water, as Dennis J Bernstein reports.

By Dennis J Bernstein

The lead-poisoned water of Flint, Michigan, is a national scandal that bears on multiple American problems, from poverty and race, to the impact of industrialization and deindustrialization, to political attacks on the Environmental Protection Agency and other regulators who then fail to do their jobs protecting citizens from hazards.

Columbia University Professor David Rosner, a leading expert on the deadly history of the use of lead by U.S. corporations, most notably General Motors, has documented how lead in various ways was mainlined into the blood streams of Americans, throughout the Twentieth Century, as a result of corporate greed.

Co-author of seven books on industrial and occupational hazards, including *Deceit and Denial: The Deadly Politics of Industrial Pollution* and *Lead Wars: The Politics of Science and the Fate of America's Children*, Dr. Rosner was interviewed by Dennis J Bernstein.

DB: Let's begin with the micro and work our way out to the macro. What's your best understanding of what happened in Flint? How did it come to pass that the people of Flint, mostly black and Latino, a bit less than half of them living under the poverty line, were poisoned by their own government?

DR: Well, it's government, and its industry, and it's all of us, in some sense. The short story is that the water in the Flint River corroded pipe, and leached out of those pipes lead, into the faucets, and into the water the children were drinking. And that this was essentially something that was identified literally a couple of years ago, and the problem was never addressed, and was depicted as kind of a public relations problem, rather than a public health problem.

So children were ingesting this lead, and they were accumulating lead in their blood. And a young physician, Mona Hanna-Attisha, discovered that she was seeing in her hospital that children were coming in with elevated blood lead levels. And that this was strange, that there was a real spike, that the children were coming in poisoned. And she began to make an issue of it. And she got the attention of some legislators finally, and also community leaders who began to protest the fact that these children were coming in with lead poisoning. She was, at first, basically brushed off as kind of an overwrought, young physician, a pediatrician.

But slowly it began to emerge that there had been lots of correspondence about the polluted water. And that the water was corroding the pipes. And that there was a real problem here that ultimately made national headlines and became an issue of national importance. The tiny issue, the kind of microcosm is that there was a crisis identified luckily and became, by a whole set of circumstances, the focal point of national attention. The broader issue, of course, is much more complex, it goes deep into the history of, basically, our exploitation of this community, and of its people, and of poor communities around the country.

DB: I want to get there, right now, professor. You left it off at a good spot. This is a question [that] will get us into General Motors, about who knew what,

when. A couple of details just are drilling through my brain. ... The fact that, on the one hand, the government made available water coolers for state workers in Flint and they were given the option to drink the water cooler water or the poison. That's one thing, and then we also find out that General Motors got a special dispensation from, I guess it's Lake Huron, because their parts were being corroded by the water that they were feeding to the people and the kids of Flint.

DR: Well, you know, the story goes deeper into Flint's history, industrial history. The first point is who knew what when? Anybody who knew anything about the history of Flint ... when an historian thinks of Flint what they think of is General Motors. What they think of is the fact that ... one of the largest labor disputes in American history occurred in Flint.

It was the sight of the formation, really, of the United Auto Workers. It was the sight of the formation of, really, major parts of the CIO in the 1930's, over working conditions, because [of] the working conditions and wages ... because this was the largest industrial auto plant in the country. Maybe with the exception of Ford. It was the place where Chevrolets were built, where Cadillacs were built, where Fisher Body Parts Company was.

This was [where] miles of the waterfront were literally plants, 80 acres of that city were literally industrial plants, building cars in the 1930s. And when you think about that, what you realize is that river was basically the sewer for, not only the car manufacturers, but the people who made batteries, and supplied batteries for those cars which were filled with lead and toxins; the people who made the glass which had lead in it and silica; the people who made oil and lubricating materials that went into the cars; the people who made the paint that was leaded paint that would ultimately cover the cars.

In some sense this was a giant industrial pollution site literally from the 1920s on. And [it] was the site of labor disputes because of working conditions, because of the exploitation of those people. So the history of Flint is rooted in this industrial production and also in the pollution of that river, because that river was the place where the refuse was dumped.

So the first thing that would occur to you is that this is a river and a piece of land that has to be really closely monitored. The second thing that should have occurred to them and would have occurred to them, is that for 50 years people stopped drinking out of that river. They stopped using Flint water over 50 years ago, because of the potential of pollution. They actually shipped the water all the way from Lake Huron because that river from basically Flint all the way up the river, to the Saginaw River, and up to Saginaw was one giant production line, for production of the car, the American motor car.

So that's what you would think of as an historian. [The river] they were drinking out of, in the first place, whether it had lead or not lead, whether it was corroding pipes or not corroding pipes, it was kind of a nutty idea, because you just know you had to really inspect that water. Then the other thing, as you raise and point out, General Motors itself stopped using that water because it destroyed the transmissions of their cars. It was not pure enough to use for manufacturing the car, the transmissions. So they stopped using it.

The other thing, of course, was that a couple of years ago, or a year ago, they started shipping water into state buildings. So there was a lot of suspicion about what that water was. It's not necessarily that they knew lead was in it, but they knew that something was wrong with it. And that they depicted this as a minor problem really talks to a much broader history of the domination of industries, but also the political power structure in Flint, and in Michigan in general, which was essentially a power structure that emphasized low levels of regulation, little government, suspicion of government, attempts to make sure that government didn't do anything.

So, while we think that the government, the bureaucrats, the government regulators were at fault, in fact they had been subjected to 30 years of constant propaganda about how they shouldn't touch business, especially in a state which had just gone through major economic crises. You know, the idea of regulating companies or forcing them to clean up the messes they made, or to even start regulating the environment, would have been depicted as an assault on industries, an assault on jobs. ...

I think we all, watching the presidential elections, we know what would have happened. So on the one hand, I blame government for not doing anything. On the other hand, I understand how the EPA and the local water environmental quality people, and all the other people who should have had their fingers on this issue, were in some sense intimidated about ever raising this issue until it became a crisis. You know, there are many Flints. Flint, Michigan, is just one of many sites around the country that have been used for industrial production, and they were abandoned. And, so, in some sense we're experiencing many, many Flints. We just don't know about them yet.

DB: I was teaching in the New York City school system in the early and mid-seventies, and it became illegal to paint the schools with lead, in I think it was 1978. I do know that I was a teacher of emotionally disturbed children and I worked with therapists and all the things that I'm reading about again, reading about in terms of the impacts of lead poisoning on kids and learning is just, again, devastating.

And I want to ask you before we go on and paint a larger picture, here around

the country, I want to ask you how bad ... what's your informed judgment in terms of how bad the damage is going to be to the people, to the children? What can we say about that? We have about 100,000 folks who live in Flint.

DR: Sure. Well, in Flint and in the rest of the country ... you know, first of all you have to understand that this epidemic is probably the longest running childhood, self-inflicted epidemic in American history. It's been going on since early 1900's. We've known about the dangers of lead paint specifically, and lead on the neurological development of the children. In the early part of the century, children went into convulsions, and comas and died from lead exposure. More recently, as it was put into gasoline, the kids breathed [it] in ...

I remember ethyl gasoline. It was in the paint, it covered every wall. And it doesn't take much lead to really poison a child. It takes less than a thumb nail sized ... you know, one coat of a thumb nail could send a kid into convulsions. I mean, that's the amount of lead it takes to harm a child. It's the dust on the walls, it's not big chunks of lead, it's not a bullet that you swallow, it's not chips that come off the wall. It's dust. ...

Our country, many of our cities, in the East and, I guess, the West, particularly were covered with lead because the cities expanded dramatically at the end of the 19th and early 20th century, we built entire cities. The whole mid-western belt of...rust belt cities were built in that period of time. And they all used lead at one point or another.

I mean, just to give your listeners a sense of what we're talking about ... this isn't just a little bit of color, a little bit of lead in a can of paint, but throughout the early part of the century, at least the first half of the century, at least a half of every can of paint was composed of lead carbonate. At least in lead paint, I should say. There were other alternatives. But, if you painted with lead paint, you were talking about painting with 50 percent of the can of paint would be lead carbonate, which meant essentially every can of paint would smear up to 15 pounds of lead on the walls of a home.

So when you think about painting a city that was built in the early part of the century, over and over again, when you think about the number, the coats of paint that go on each time, and the number of times you paint in any 50 year period, you're talking about every home having hundreds and hundreds of pounds of a neurotoxin of which the size of a nail is enough to send a kid into convulsions. So you're talking about a huge problem, a huge problem.

The simple fact is that kids began to be identified as having lead poisoning as early as 1904 in Australia, and increasing throughout the early part of the century. In the United States we began identifying children in the 19-teens, a

century ago now, as having been exposed to lead and developing convulsions and dying. We had, in the 1920's, many articles that appeared in medical and public health journals, and yet, despite that, the lead industry, the lead pigment industry, began to push more and more, and harder and harder, to introduce lead into all the paints we used.

So the National Lead Company, for example, owned a company, I guess it's still in existence, I don't know if they own it anymore, Dutch Boy Paint. We've all seen the symbol of the Dutch Boy. The guy that sits on a swing with a brush in his hand. They marketed it to families. They told children to paint books that had the Dutch Boy in story land. Images of the Dutch Boy conquering old man gloom, and protecting the child from the evils of wall paper. I mean it's really bizarre stuff, of 19th century houses that had to be repainted and they're saying get rid of old man gloom, this 19th century dark color, we can brighten up your home.

DB: I remember those Dutch Boy commercials. I loved them.

DR: Yeah, and these advertisements are quite astounding. And they gave out booklets to kids, in paint stores. And told their parents to go buy this paint. And they gave out costumes to use as paint. So at the same time that internally, in their own corporate records, they're talking about children dying from exposure to paint, they're talking about it as a public relations problem, not a public health problem.

They're saying "It's really terrible. But it's only happening..." they say at one point... "among Negro and Puerto Rican families. So let's not worry about it. We can't deal with it until we've torn down all the cities because all the cities' housing is filled with this stuff. So we can't really deal with it. And it's only among Negro and Puerto Rican families that [it's] happening. And it's among ignorant women, ignorant families that don't know how to take care of their kids, that's causing this problem in the first place."

This is the 1950's. In 1950's they're talking about this problem. And beforehand, they're identifying the kids dying, they fought legislation in Baltimore and elsewhere. And they fought warning labels that would indicate that lead was a problem. They threatened people with lawsuits, or physicians with lawsuits who identified lead poisoning among the children. They offered money and grants to people in order not to study it. It's a really ugly history, like it really rivals, in fact I think it precedes the tobacco industry's Joe Camel, and all the advertising and lies that they gave.

So you have this situation where in 1955 they're saying "Look, we have a real problem, there's a real problem here but it's only affecting those families and

it's probably due to the fact that the parents are ignorant. They don't know how to stop the kid from crawling on the floor, and putting their hands in their mouth, or going near a wall, that's painted with lead."

It's a heartrending story that means that we've literally poisoned knowingly for a century, generations and generations of kids, most of whom were minority kids, most of whom were politically powerless. And we're, in some sense, just beginning to cope with the massive damage. Kids don't go into comas anymore, but they do get affected by this low-level exposure that causes them to develop subtle neurological problems: learning disorders, loss of IQ, behavioral problems, attention deficit, hyperactivity, all sorts of issues that interfere in their school performance, interfere in their lives, and interfere and literally change the course of their lives. So it's an ongoing tragedy.

And the CDC still says that there are about 500,000 children with elevated blood lead levels, now, in the country. And this is a century after we began identifying children as having exposure to lead, and lead being a terrible neurotoxin [] for children. I'm sorry I'm going on too long.

DB: No, no, it's incredibly important. There's a tremendous amount of information that we know. But there's a little blockage because of all the stuff you were talking about in terms of the way in which the corporations have suppressed real information, and corporate media really isn't all that interested. So it's very important to hear what you say Dr. Rosner. Just two more issues I want to hit. First of all, the broader picture, we're not just talking about Flint. I guess you have your eyes on a few other cities. Tell us about the broader picture.

DR: Well, the broader picture is that this is a problem in every community in the country, this low-level exposure. Every time a family moves into an older building, a Victorian house, and renovates, they're releasing lead. Every time they scrape a wall, every time they repaint and sand, you know, sand a wall to make it flat, every time they have a leak in the roof, that leads to paint puckering up, every time they drink out of the water fountain in older cities, where the pipes still exist, and the pipes are leaching lead, you've got a problem. And so we have to figure out how to address it. And everyone has been asking, "Why doesn't government change it?"

And the bigger question is, "Why," – and this is a problem that will take a lot of money, a lot of time, it can be done systematically, it doesn't have to break the bank, but, – "Why isn't the industry, why aren't the industries that actually profited for generations from the use of lead, and actually sold it and created this mess in the first place, why aren't they held accountable? Why aren't they being asked to contribute to lead poisoning?" There are big suits

here in California. There was a big trial a couple of years ago, in which there was a lawsuit against the lead pigment manufacturers...

DB: And they won a bunch of money, right?

DR: Well, [the state] won \$1.15 billion from these companies. It's now under appeal in the Supreme Court. And everyone is wondering how it's going to turn out because it's a very big political issue, if the Supreme Court decides that this can go forward, this is legitimate and it's not going to be appealed. I'm not sure if it's the Supreme Court or the appeals court, actually. I'm not sure how you are structured there.

The point is, it's now being appealed and if it ultimately goes the way that the judge decided in the first place, this is a way of thinking about [how] other cities are going to think about this. Because this is extremely important. It was an extremely groundbreaking and important suit, but you have to realize that this is just one set of communities, it's San Diego, and Los Angeles, and San Francisco, and Oakland and a couple of other major communities in the state, that brought the suit. And everyone's waiting with baited breath about how this is going to come out.

DB: In terms of the nature of racism in the communities that are subjected to this, these communities are the least able to fight back, to hire the ... legal power. All this kind of stuff. What are your thoughts, just ... back to the micro ... the governor [of Michigan] says he's not gonna show up [to Congressional hearings]. I guess they're having hearings, they asked him to come to hearings. But he had to do budget work in Michigan. One wonders if this budget is going to include clean water for the people of Flint.

But isn't it important to start investigating? The EPA has investigative powers, the Justice Department, all this kind of stuff. You poison people, you should be held accountable. Do you think that that would help start the ball rolling if the marshals went to gather up the governor of Michigan so he can testify and tell the truth about what happened?

DR: Well, to tell you the truth, I've never understood why these were always liability suits over individual amounts of money, when, in fact, this seems like criminal behavior. But, of course, it should be [investigated], ... This has to be investigated. I mean this is a paradigmatic case in a way. This is a paradigm for lots of other communities, and they have to know how it happened. And also you have to investigate and expose even if you don't ultimately win a victory in terms of holding somebody personally accountable or the state accountable, because you want to put other people on notice around the country.

You want to let other departments of health to know that it's not going to be easy to avoid. And that if they are not doing their job, or if they're not regulating, if they're not standing up for communities, they're going to be held accountable. So I think it's extremely important that investigations go forward if for no other reason to really publicly shame both public officials, and corporations and those individuals who allowed this to happen. There are kid's lives that are being affected.

DB: And it is true, right, that you really can't turn the clock back on lead poisoning. Once you got it, you got it.

DR: Well, once the damage is done, it's a very insidious poison because it affects the neurology at very young ages. It changes the course of children's lives, even in utero, it seems. But if a mother takes in lead, it will affect the child on initial exposure. It will change the behavior. ... I'm not a neurologist, right? I feel awkward saying this, it will affect the brain, the development of the brain.

And once that pathway, or once the brain, is damaged it's never going to heal, so to speak, because it's still developing. It will develop around the problem, whatever the biochemical or physiological effects are, so that's what seems to be the latest understanding of lead poisoning. [A] very little amount can affect you literally before you're even aware of any developmental problems. It's not going to show up for years.

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The Future the US Budget Foretells

The key drafters of the U.S. Constitution may have had dreams of a government to "promote the general Welfare" but that goal has long since been lost to factionalism and special interests, a reality that is growing worse as money increasingly buys American politics, as Lawrence Davidson describes.

By Lawrence Davidson

I can make high-probability predictions for 2015 and the near-beyond without the benefit of a crystal ball, tarot cards or tea leaves. The only thing that I need is a list of items from the new [2015 U.S. federal budget](#). Here are some of my forecasts and the budget items that make them so highly probable:

-There will be more deadly truck-related accidents than necessary on the nation's highways in 2015. That means more deaths, injuries, highway delays, stress and frustration. How do I know? Because the 2015 budget rolls back the safety requirement that truckers need to get more rest between driving assignments.

The regulation that was rolled back was itself barely adequate. It restricted drivers to a 70-hour week with mandated rest times between long periods behind the wheel. Nonetheless, despite obviously being in the public interest, this regulation could not survive the pressure of the lobbies representing the trucking industry and its corporate customers. Now we are back to truckers working 85-hour weeks with hardly any mandated rest at all.

-Either in 2015 or soon thereafter there will be another major banking crisis requiring the outlay of enormous sums of public money to avert economic meltdown. How do I know? Because the 2015 federal budget rolls back the requirement, put in place after the last financial crisis, that forced the trading of derivatives to be done by corporate entities separated from the banks and not covered by the Federal Deposit Insurance Company.

In other words, if the banks wanted to devise unreasonably risky investment strategies for their more gullible customers, they had to insulate these strategies from their main banking operations that are crucial to the national economy. In addition the government was not required to insure such undue risks through the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation. Although obviously in the public interest, these regulations could not survive the pressure coming from the banking lobbies and so, once more, we all must be prepared to pay the price of this version of insufficiently regulated capitalism.

-The political influence of the nation's wealthiest individuals will increase by a factor of ten in 2015, making the United States more of a plutocracy and less of a democracy than at any time since the 1920s. How do I know? Because the new federal budget emasculates what little was left of the 2002 McCain-Feingold Bipartisan Campaign Finance Reform Act by increasing tenfold the amount of money individuals can give to political parties.

This is the result of conservatives' demanding that political campaigns be underwritten wholly by private funds. Common sense tells us that such an arrangement can only confirm political power in the hands of those who are already economically dominant. By the way, most countries claiming to be democracies regulate against just this dominance of private money because it is recognized as politically corrupting.

-Environmental protection will deteriorate in 2015. If you live in a rural area

where there are large farms, your water supply will become more suspect. How do I know all this? Because the 2015 federal budget slashes funding for the Environmental Protection Agency by \$60 million and forbids the same agency from applying the Clean Water Act to farm ponds and irrigation ditches. In the public interest? Of course not. However this move pleases agribusiness concerns and other industries.

–Israel, the economically developed nation that has violated just about every human rights regulation listed under international law, and also has repeatedly broken U.S. law forbidding the use of U.S.-supplied weapons for offensive actions against civilian populations, will continue to be both economically and militarily subsidized by the American taxpayer in 2015. How do I know this? Because the 2015 federal budget follows in the footsteps of so many past budgets by setting aside huge sums of money – in the present case \$3.1 billion in total aid – for the Zionist state. Of that aid package, \$619.8 million is military related.

I could not get exact gross figures for how much money the federal government gives back per year to U.S. states for various programs, but certainly Israel gets more of your federal tax dollar than any single state does, and maybe more than all 50 states put together.

On the same topic of foreign aid to undeserving governments, the 2015 budget will help insure the survival of the brutal military dictatorship in Egypt. That bunch of gangsters will be getting \$1.3 billion in military aid.

These dubious expenditures are also not in the U.S. public interest for they will undermine democracy in Egypt and uphold dictatorship. In the case of Israel the money will help uphold racist authoritarianism, ethnic cleansing and religious bigotry. All of which (including the aid to Egypt) has been successfully encouraged by the financial power of the Zionist lobby.

Boehner's Bipartisanship

According to House Speaker John Boehner, the 2015 federal budget is a product of bipartisan compromise: "Understand all these provisions were worked out in a bipartisan, bi-cameral fashion."

However, this can hardly be the whole story. Boehner's statement implies that there were only Republicans and Democrats in the proverbial back room where the budget was worked out and that everyone was practicing sweet reason so as to come to a compromise that benefits the nation.

In truth, looking over the shoulders of those representing both parties were numerous lobbyists who had given a lot of money to all these politicians and now

wanted something back for their investment. As a result, we as a nation, as a community, were thoroughly outbid by the trucking industry, the bankers, agribusiness, and a good number of conservative ideologues who want the right to gut the federal government (particularly the Environmental Protection Agency and the Internal Revenue Service) while monopolizing funding of our two major political parties. They want to do this so that, among other things, they don't have worry about regulations or pay even a reasonable amount of taxes.

The ultimate conclusion we can draw from this "bipartisan" process is that there is no sense of national interest, and damn little sense of community, in the American political system. Both concepts have been superseded by the particular parochial goals and sense of solidarity of groups and subgroups with the deep pockets necessary to buy legislators and legislation.

This is what happens when democracy allows itself to be captured by an increasingly unregulated capitalist ethic – an erosion of any politically based sense of a need to work for the common good.

The really depressing part is that for most of our national history it has not been very different. In the mid-Nineteenth Century, President James Polk, himself a man of questionable integrity, observed, "There is more selfishness and less principle among members of Congress than I had any conception of, before I became President of the United States." Well, the problem persists, and given our political way of doing things, it may never be fully overcome.

Lawrence Davidson is a history professor at West Chester University in Pennsylvania. He is the author of *Foreign Policy Inc.: Privatizing America's National Interest*; *America's Palestine: Popular and Official Perceptions from Balfour to Israeli Statehood*; and *Islamic Fundamentalism*.

Seepage from an Aging Nuclear Site

The nuclear industry hasn't solved the long-term problem of what to do with nuclear waste, which presents a uniquely dangerous environmental threat. That danger is now highlighted by leakage at one of the oldest nuclear sites in the world, Washington State's Hanford facility, writes Gina Mason.

By Gina Mason

Living with radiation sickness is not on my bucket list, and I would hazard that it isn't on yours either. Nor is it what I have in mind for my children's

future. Yet our government continues to manufacture nuclear materials and unsafely store radioactive waste in clear violation of the public trust.

Nowhere is this more visible than at Washington State's Hanford Nuclear Reservation, the most radioactively contaminated site in the western hemisphere, where we now know radioactive sludge is leaking badly from at least six underground tanks. The management of this catastrophe is vitally important to the Pacific Northwest and the rest of the nation, indeed, the biosphere. Unfortunately, environmental disasters do not stop at city, state or national borders.

The Hanford Nuclear Reservation is located on the 1,243-mile-long Columbia River and sits upstream from drinking water facilities for the Washington Tri-Cities area, tribal lands and many other towns and cities before it empties into the Pacific Ocean.

Built in 1943, this facility is home to the first plutonium production reactor. Hanford is responsible for having manufactured the material used in the first atomic bombs, including the bomb that killed and poisoned scores of thousands in Nagasaki, Japan, on Aug. 9, 1945.

An environmental remediation legal structure called the Tri-Party Agreement governs the cleanup efforts by the Environmental Protection Agency, Washington Department of Ecology, and the U.S. Department of Energy. Bechtel, a construction and engineering firm, is currently overseeing the construction of a vitrification plant that will stabilize the worst of the radioactive materials with glass. Added to the Superfund list in 1989, the cleanup of Hanford is woefully behind its original 30-year schedule.

Recent news articles and Washington Gov. Jay Inslee's announcements about the nuclear hazard have brought Hanford back into the national spotlight as the large tanks containing radioactive waste are leaking into the nearby aquifers at a reported rate of 300 gallons per day.

Many of the site's 177 underground tanks are losing radioactive liquid. In fact, prior to the latest news, the Washington Department of Ecology reported that the contaminated water could reach the Columbia in anywhere from 12 to 15 years. The U.S. Department of Energy reports on the leaking tanks but never quite fixes them while the DOE Hanford website indicates nothing out of the ordinary.

With many of the tanks holding a million gallons each, this is enormous and means the United States is producing a massive radioactive waterway. It is the government's responsibility to deal with Hanford before its citizens suffer considerable environmental, health and economic damage. Considering the rate of

cleanup and the lack of public awareness, this is an almost certain fate. Furthermore, the threat of sequestration is risking even the slowest paced cleanup operations at Hanford.

When stacked against other environmental issues timber clear-cutting, setting aside wilderness areas and even plastic waste floats larger than Texas, the risk of radioactive contamination to our environment is infinitely more catastrophic. I feel that this issue demands our full attention.

Unlike the Fukushima disaster only two years ago, the Hanford radioactive leaks are not the result of a massive natural disaster triggering an anthropogenic catastrophe. This is an event brought on entirely by our own human arrogance and mismanagement, demonstrated repeatedly by poor predictions about how safe it all is.

If anything, our utter failure to clean up a terrible mess made way back in World War II and the Cold War shows our hubris in continuing to maintain nuclear weapons somehow believing we can control them. All it takes with nuclear weapons is one mistake and we are all only human. Mistakes are inevitable. The biggest mistake of all is to fail to dismantle the nuclear arsenal now and clean up the massive mess as quickly and safely as we can.

Under the Tri-Party Agreement, cleanup was scheduled to be completed by 2018 and has since been revised to 2040. This makes the specter of a radioactive Columbia River an assured nightmare without action from grassroots organizations and community involvement. This current trajectory is an absolutely unacceptable legacy.

It is not too late. We have the ability to alter the impending disaster by placing pressure on responsible government agencies, legislators, community leaders and contractors to safely increase the pace of the cleanup operations, and to tell Congress to shift all \$2.46 billion in nuclear weapons "modernization" funds to cleanup, or at least what's left after sequestration.

Talks have repeatedly stalled between agencies regarding the timeline of waste containment. We citizens are in a position to leverage public interest as a means to get the negotiating parties back to the table. The year 2013 has the potential to be the year that Hanford Nuclear Reservation makes a dramatic shift to move off the Superfund list in a quick and responsible manner.

Gina Mason, MS, is Oregon Peace Institute Research Director and writes for PeaceVoice. [To see what Native American tribes are doing on this issue, click here.]
