

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH

Peter Schwartzman

Six informative statistics

{Note: This will be the first in a series of list-oriented contributions. Readers are asked to submit their own entries and rankings.}

350. This number represents the acceptable concentration of CO₂ in the atmosphere (in parts per million, ppm) according to Dr. James Hansen, Head of NASA. He argues vociferously that if we don't get global levels to this threshold soon, we risk an ice-free planet (which among other things would increase global sea-level by more than 200 feet). Unfortunately, the atmospheric levels of CO₂ are well above this threshold and have been so for some time; current levels are ~390 ppm. While the catastrophic changes that would occur as a result of an ice-free planet aren't likely in the next 50-100 years, Hansen and others warn that 350 ppm must be the goal for the near future. Otherwise, we might not be able to turn the process around (i.e., enough CO₂ will be in the atmosphere to make large scale ice sheet melting irreversible). Hansen calls for the immediate phase out of coal, as the best means to reach this goal.

2,310,984 and growing. Unbelievably, this is how many people are currently held in U.S. prisons or jails. This is more than any nation in the world. In fact, though the U.S. is home to less than 5 percent of the world's population, it houses nearly 25 percent of all the world's prisoners. The U.S. has the highest incarceration rate of all countries and almost fivefold higher than the world's average (Senator Jim Webb, of Virginia, in *Parade*, 3/29/09). Worse yet, 4.7 percent of black men and 1.8 percent of Hispanic men are held in prison or jail, compared to only 0.7 percent of white men; these numbers more than double when one looks only at men between the ages of 20 and 30 (U.S. Department of Justice). How can we claim to be the "land of the free" with statistics like this?

9,237. Between Russia and the United States, this is how many active nuclear warheads they have. All other countries combined have less than 900. Just when you thought the Cold War was over, the threat of nuclear war between India and Pakistan has many experts on high alert, and now along comes North Korea into the fray. Noteworthy as well, these weapons are much larger than the ones used on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. But are we safer?

The U.S. and Russia have both reduced their nuclear arsenals since the 1990s but the pace is too slow for many, and nuclear proliferation seems to continue unabated. Just last year, the U.S. Congress voted to approve a nuclear technology transfer deal with India. This agreement understandably raised red flags in Pakistan, and recent U.S. bombings in Pakistan and Afghanistan (its neighbor to the West) certainly doesn't lessen their anxiety. Furthermore, what is the U.S. doing providing nuclear technology to one of the few countries in the world that hasn't signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation

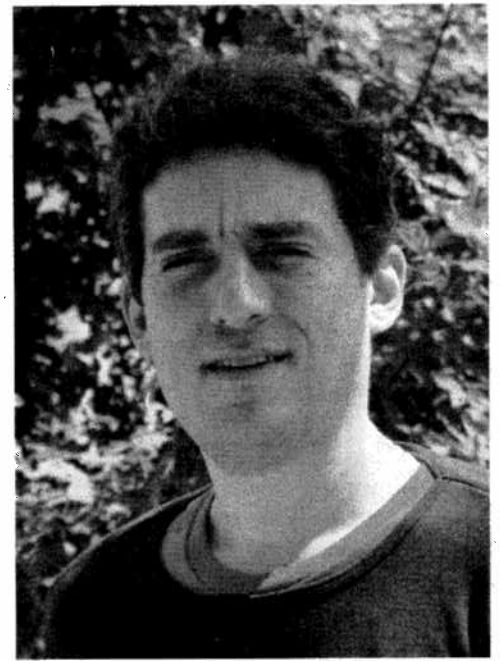
Treaty, which dates back to 1968? (North Korea, Israel and Pakistan are the other three non-signees.)

1. What if I told you that there is one country in the world that refuses to sign treaties and international agreements pertaining to environmental health and protection? Would you correctly guess which one it is? Consider these agreements. The Kyoto Protocol (which went into effect in 2005) attempts the "stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system." Among the very few countries that hasn't ratified Kyoto, we find the United States, Chad, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Somalia. The Biodiversity Convention (BC, adopted in 1992) has three goals: (1) to conserve biodiversity worldwide; (2) to sustainably use biological resources; and, (3) the "fair and equitable sharing" of genetic resources (such as medicines derived from plants). Currently, 192 countries have ratified the BC except for the United States and the Holy See (aka, the Vatican). The Stockholm Convention (entered into force in 2004) now bans about 20 dangerous chemicals from use (including, atrazine, lindane, etc.). Over 150 countries have ratified it, including most European nations. Italy, Russia, and once again, the United States are among the notable exceptions. (See more at: <chm.pops.int>.) What about the Basel Convention? This international accord (commenced in 1992) sets out to restrict the dissemination of hazardous waste across national boundaries. Currently, the Convention has 172 national Parties. Surprise (hardly), the United States isn't one of them. So, the country that stands out in tacit opposition to so many international agreements is yours truly, the United States. Is it any wonder that the world's people think the U.S. is not "playing by the rules"? Also, how is it that we commonly hear that the U.S. is the environmental leader in the world?

45 million. This is the conservative estimate of the number of people in the United States who currently don't have health insurance. When one adds the underinsured, the number goes up several tens of millions more. Even among those working, 20 percent lack health insurance (AP, 3/24/09). This is shameful in the richest country in the world. As you may have heard, the United States is the only industrialized country that doesn't provide universal health coverage to its citizens. Stranger still, we spend more on health care than any other country, more than two times the median amount spent in other industrialized countries. Is it any wonder then that many of us go to Canada or Mexico to buy legal drugs? Is there any wonder why many lower and middle class people in the U.S. use emergency rooms as their first line of health defense? How costly is this practice? Additionally, perhaps there

is a connection between the billions that we spend on nuclear weapons and our collective inability to provide health care to our people. Hmm, something to look into.

1. One planet Earth. This may seem trite but it bears repeating. This is all we have folks. We aren't going to be moving to the Moon (with no atmosphere) or Venus (with 90-times the atmosphere as Earth) anytime soon. So, the more we poison, despoil, degrade, or destroy this planet, the worse it will be for us and future generations. But you know the more time and energy we spend cleaning up, caring for, and trying to live in a sustainable way with our planet, the better our and our children's lives will be. Lack of focus on these insights serves nobody well. There is no time to waste. Is there?

**BEYOND THE BELTWAY**
Donald Kaul**Sotomayor:
a trap for Republicans**

We're about to see just how dumb the Republican Party in general, and conservatives in particular, really are. I'm betting pretty dumb.

In one of his characteristically shrewd political moves, President Barack Obama last week nominated Sonia Sotomayor to replace David Souter on the U.S. Supreme Court. Judge Sotomayor, for those of you who may not be up to speed on your Appeals Court Judges, is as close to bulletproof as you can get when it comes to Supreme Court nominees. First of all, she is Hispanic and a woman, both politically good things to be, given that there have been only two women on the court before her and no Hispanics.

Second, she has a resume out of Horatio Alger. Grew up in public housing in the South Bronx. Lost her father at the age of 9. Won a scholarship to Princeton, that toffee-nosed bastion of the Establishment. Finished at the top of her class. Went on to Yale Law, where she was editor of the law review.

Became a federal prosecutor in New York City. Later went into private practice, then on to the federal bench, first at circuit court level, then appellate.

Academic credentials, practical experience, compelling personal narrative; she's got it all.

And Republicans are making noises as though they'll oppose her nomination — indeed, perhaps block it — on grounds that she is a judicial activist.

Senator Jon Kyl, a snarky Republican from Arizona, said as much. Mitt Romney and Mike Huckabee — what passes for leading contenders for the Republican presidential nomination these days — have been singing the same song.

"If she's confirmed," said Huckabee, "then we need to take the blindfold off Lady Justice."

There are times when Huckabee seems a perfectly sensible fellow and others when it seems his jockey shorts are too tight.

For a long time now, Republicans have been riding the myth that liberals are judicial activists and Republicans never color outside the lines of the Constitution. It's bunk.

The conservative majority on the present

court is about as activist as you can get, continually ignoring precedent in order to achieve a conservative result (as it did in handing the 2000 election to George Bush, for example). Conservatives also contend that the federal court system is shot through with activist liberals who insist on making law, rather than ruling on it and that only a Republican president can stop the onslaught. More bunk. More than two-thirds of the federal judiciary has been chosen by Republicans and it shows. We have a very conservative judiciary.

They're even saying that Judge Sotomayor really wouldn't be the first Hispanic on the court, citing Benjamin Cardozo, a Franklin Delano Roosevelt appointee in 1932, as the first. Except that Cardozo came from a family of Sephardic Jews who had emigrated here from Portugal by way of England in the 18th Century. Some Hispanic. He wouldn't have known salsa from seltzer.

Personally, I kind of hope the Republicans do fight Sotomayor's nomination to the bitter end. In the last election, John McCain drew 31 percent of the Hispanic vote, down from the 44 percent that Bush got four years earlier. What is the GOP doing, shooting for single digits?

When Sotomayor arrived on the Princeton campus in 1972, she was one of only a handful of Hispanic students there. Alumni were still protesting the presence of women, who had been admitted to the school only a few years before. One of the protesters was now-Justice Sam Alito, Jr., who had graduated earlier that year. That's what this nomination fight is about, not activism versus formalism, but a tired old conservative vision of society. Is it something run by an exclusive men's club, or is it something in which a tough Puerto Rican kid from the Bronx can use her smarts to get a seat at the table?

Absent tax problems or scandal, the Republicans are on the wrong side of this in every way you can be on the wrong side of something. Which is getting to be a habit with them.

Don Kaul is a two-time Pulitzer Prize-losing Washington correspondent who, by his own account, is right more than he's wrong. Email: dkaul2@earthlink.net

Therapeutic Massage Professionals

Rebecca Huber RN, LMT
Serving The Area 15 Years
Massage Nutritional Counseling



311 East Main Street
Suite 210
Galesburg, IL 61401
309-343-5256