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<http://www.precaution.org/lib/06/chemicals.2005.060125.htm>

From: Rachel's News #839, Jan. 26, 2006

IN 2005 THE WHEELS CAME OFF THE U.S. CHEMICAL-REGULATION SYSTEM

[Rachel's summary: In 2005 the Wall Street Journal blew the whistle on the U.S. system for regulating chemicals, showing that it is based on scientific assumptions that are simply wrong, and that the system is allowing all of the nation's babies and children to be exposed to combinations of industrial poisons that no one even knows how to evaluate for safety.]

By Peter Montague

[In this series we are describing the important events of 2005. -- Editors]

The wheels came off the U.S. chemical regulatory system in a very public way in 2005. The Wall Street Journal published a 4-part series showing that the system is scientifically bankrupt because it is based on assumptions that are simply wrong.

Despite these revelations, bureaucratic inertia allowed the system to keep on trucking, but I suppose that's to be expected. Acknowledging the harsh truth would be too devastating, personally, for the well-intended, hard-working civil servants who have devoted their lives to the proposition that a chemical regulatory system like ours could somehow protect human health and the environment from the industrial poisons that are intentionally discharged in multi-billion-ton

quantities year after year into the air, water, and soil that make life possible.

Think of it -- 1800 brand-new chemicals gushing into commercial channels each year, without the responsible parties being required to provide any detailed health or safety testing data. Armed with minimal (or no) health and safety data, the government then has a scant few months in which to prove that one or another of these 1800 new chemicals poses an "unreasonable risk" to human health or the environment. If by some miracle the government feels it can meet that scientific and legal burden and it orders the responsible party to produce some safety-test results, the responsible party can go to court to dispute the government's order. In court, even a modest-sized corporation like Monsanto can field an army of junkyard-dog lawyers to oppose the government; the government, for its part, has been shredded and downsized by decades of tax cuts, so its legal staff is a gaggle of relative pipsqueaks compared to any major chemical corporation's.

Given such a system, what are the chances that industrial poisons will NOT be released into the environment in harmful quantities? Zero. The system was designed to fail from the get-go in 1965. What's amazing is that all of us have been able to convince ourselves for 40 years that the U.S. chemical regulatory system is basically sound -- that if we all just keep pretending it is working, somehow it will work.

"Oh, our emperor is wearing a fine set of threads, isn't he? Yes, yes, look at that golden raiment glinting in the sunlight.... [40-year pause]... Oh my, isn't that his willy I'm seeing?"

Today, I doubt you could find a single federal scientist who actually believes in his or her heart that the chemical regulatory system is presently protecting the public adequately from unwanted assault by industrial poisons. But of course they could never admit anything like that in public -- for one thing, they'd be fired or sent to Siberia (or Kansas) almost immediately.

It may be years before the full extent of the system's essentially-total failure is acknowledged in Washington -- if ever -- but to anyone who reads the Wall Street Journal carefully, the U.S. chemical regulatory system now looks like a 40-year-old jalopy, rusted out, gussied up every four years with a fresh paint job of promises, its credibility sustained mainly by the "Ooohs and aaahs" of the chemical corporation flaks who designed and built the system 40 years ago and who are desperately hoping no one will notice that their baby is a tangled heap of legal junk that has NEVER protected workers, moms, or babies -- not to mention the fish, birds, beasts and vegetables that most of us eat, and the water we drink.

What's odd is that the truth leaked out in 2005 not through the nation's "newspaper of record," the New York Times (which continues to oooh and aaah that the system will be ready to roll any day now -- all that's needed is more research) but through the Wall Street Journal (WSJ). This leads me to believe that the editors of the Journal must have seen clouds of liability lawsuits on the horizon for their main readers, the corporate elite, and they felt they simply had to raise a warning flag by revealing a modicum of the truth.

The truth, it turns out, ain't pretty, when you get it in concentrated bites -- like four long stories by a powerful WSJ writer named Peter Waldman.

In a series that began in July{1}, the WSJ told its readers that, "For years... something about modern living has driven a steady rise of certain maladies, from breast and prostate cancer to autism and learning disabilities."

In the very next paragraph the WSJ said "one suspect that is drawing intense scrutiny" from scientists is "the prevalence in the environment of certain industrial chemicals at extremely low levels -- minute levels previously thought to be biologically insignificant."

The third paragraph contains this bomb shell: "An especially striking finding: It appears that some substances may have effects at the very lowest exposures that are absent at higher levels."

Striking indeed. The WSJ goes on to explain that this "especially striking finding" runs contrary to the basic premise of the science of toxicology which was established 500 years ago by the Swiss physician (and alchemist and astrologer) Paracelsus: "The dose makes the poison."

If the "dose makes the poison" then tiny doses should be assumed non- poisonous, shouldn't they? The entire chemical regulation system is built on that assumption (as is the science of toxicology) -- but it now turns out that this assumption doesn't necessarily hold true. A striking finding, indeed. More like a Richter-8 earthquake. As the WSJ said, "the new science of low-dose exposure is challenging centuries of accepted wisdom about toxic substances and rattling the foundation of environmental law" -- because U.S. environmental laws are ALL based on the assumption that tiny doses don't have any biological consequences.

To its great credit, the WSJ doesn't flinch and doesn't stop there. It immediately asks the obvious question: "But what if it turned out that common substances have essentially no safe exposure levels at all?" And it immediately offers a hard-edged answer: "That was ultimately what the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency concluded about lead after studying its effects on children for decades."

So there's no safe dose of lead for children, EPA acknowledges, yet U.S. industry is allowed to continue to use about 260,000 metric tons of lead each year{2} all of which eventually enters the environment and gets into air, soil,

water, and the food chain. That fact alone sums up the effectiveness of the U.S. regulatory system.

But it gets worse. The WSJ immediately points out that "...scientists have found that with some chemicals, traces as minute as mere parts per trillion have biological effects. That's one-millionth of the smallest traces even measurable three decades ago, when many of today's environmental laws were written." No wonder our laws have failed us -- they were based on false assumptions about the biological effects of low doses of chemicals.

Having completely discredited the basis of the nation's environmental protection laws, the WSJ goes on to lob another grenade into the crowd: "Some chemical traces appear to have greater effects in combination than singly, another challenge to traditional toxicology, which tests things individually." Whatever remained of traditional toxicology has now been blown to smithereens (more on this below).

Now the WSJ starts blasting away with some evidence to back up its frontal assault on toxicology and the nation's failed structure of environmental protection laws:

** "Tiny doses of bisphenol A, which is used in polycarbonate plastic baby bottles and in resins that line food cans, have been found to alter brain structure, neurochemistry, behavior, reproduction and immune response in animals...."

** "Minute levels of phthalates, which are used in toys, building materials, drug capsules, cosmetics and perfumes, have been statistically linked to sperm damage in men and genital changes, asthma and allergies in children. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has detected comparable levels in Americans' urine...."

** "A chemical used in munitions, called perchlorate, is known to inhibit production of thyroid hormone, which children need for brain development. The chemical has been detected in drinking-water supplies in 35 states, as well as in fruits, vegetables and breast milk...."

** "The weed killer atrazine has been linked to sexual malformations in frogs that were exposed to water containing just 1/30th as much atrazine as the EPA regards as safe in human drinking water...."

** "Since the review panel met in 2000, scientists have published more than 100 peer-reviewed articles reporting further low-dose effects in living animals and in human cells."

The WSJ then goes on to give examples of chemicals that cause biological effects at low doses but no such effects at high doses -- thus standing Paracelsus and the science of toxicology on their heads. The mechanism seems to be that some hormone-disrupting chemicals at low doses latch onto the "hormone receptor sites" on cells and trigger unnatural biological responses, such as brain and reproductive system abnormalities. At higher doses the same chemical

overwhelms the hormone-receptor system and the whole system shuts down, producing no biological response at all.

The WSJ then gives an example of chemicals that, taken alone, produce no biological response, but taken together add up to produce a response: "Environmental chemicals don't exist in isolation. People are exposed to many different ones in trace amounts. So scientists at the University of London checked a mixture. They tested the hormonal strength of a blend of 11 common chemicals that can mimic estrogen [female sex hormone].

"Alone, each was very weak. But when scientists mixed low doses of all 11 in a solution with natural estrogen -- thus simulating the chemical cocktail that's inside the human body today -- they found the hormonal strength of natural estrogen was doubled. Such an effect inside the body could disrupt hormonal action."

WSJ goes on to describe the response of U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA): "In 2000, a separate EPA-organized panel, after reviewing 49 studies, said some hormonally active chemicals affect animals at doses as low as the 'background levels' to which the general human population is subject. The panel said the health implications weren't clear but urged the EPA to revisit its regulatory procedures to make sure such chemicals are tested in animals at appropriately small doses.

"The EPA hesitated. It responded in 2002 that 'until there is an improved scientific understanding of the low-dose hypothesis, EPA believes that it would be premature to require routine testing of substances for low-dose effects.'...

In other words, EPA's position is, "We don't even know enough to test for these effects."

It must be obvious that as time has passed, our ignorance of chemicals has grown, not diminished. We know that combinations of chemicals are important. Each year, we add 1800 new chemicals into the mix and so we know less and less about what's going on, year after year, because the environment becomes ever so much more complicated. We are not making scientific progress -- we are losing ground in the struggle to understand what we are doing to ourselves and to all the other creatures with whom we share the planet.

To summarize:

** Chemicals at low doses sometimes cause biological effects that are not present when the same chemicals are present in high doses.

Obvious implication: Almost all chemical-safety testing done during the past 40 years has been with high doses, on the erroneous assumption that "the dose makes the poison." Therefore -- as a panel of experts told the EPA -- testing needs to be done with low doses as well as high doses. But EPA says we don't even know enough to begin testing. In other words, much of the chemical testing completed during

the past 40 years needs to be re-done but the government hasn't a clue about how to begin.

** Chemicals at levels that are biologically insignificant can combine with other chemicals at levels that are biologically insignificant -- and, in so doing, can create biologically-significant combinations.

Obvious implication: Chemicals need to be tested in combinations, not merely one at a time. But there aren't enough laboratories on earth to test all the possibly-relevant combinations. There are 80,000 chemicals in current commercial use. Suppose we wanted to test only 1000 of them, and we wanted to test all possible combinations of 11 chemicals out of the 1000, How many test would be required?

The answer is 23,706,860,441,577,319,154,916,000 experiments.[1] That's 23 million million million safety tests. According to WSJ, EPA is hoping to develop new techniques that would allow them to do 15,000 safety tests in a year -- and at that rate they could test all 11-chemical combinations of 1000 chemicals in only 1,580,457,400,000,000,000,000 years (1.5 million million million years).

OK, this is ridiculous. But suppose EPA wanted to test something more realistic, like all 3-chemical combinations of only 1000 chemicals. It's still impossible -- it would require testing 166 million combinations and, at 15,000 tests per year, it would take 11,000 years to complete. So we're never going to be able to test chemicals in combinations in any thorough way -- even though the scientific literature is full of statements saying "We need to test chemicals in combination and we're working on it." Such statements are just eye wash, perhaps intended to keep us believing that the current chemical regulatory system can work if we just keep pretending that it can.

[To be continued]

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[1] The formula{3} for combinations like these is $n!/(r!(n-r)!)$ where n is the total number of chemicals, r is the number of chemicals in each subcollection and n! means "n factorial" -- see any basic introduction to statistics or probability.

- {1} http://www.precaution.org/lib/06/waldman--hormone_disrupters.05_0725.htm
- {2} <http://minerals.usgs.gov/minerals/pubs/ds05-140/lead.pdf>
- {3} <http://mathforum.org/library/drmath/view/56120.html>

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URL:
http://www.precaution.org/lib/06/half_of_breast_cancers_causd_by_environment.060124.htm

From: Oakland (Calif.) Tribune, Jan. 24, 2006

STUDY: HALF BREAST CANCERS TIED TO ENVIRONMENT

[Rachel's summary: A review of 350 studies of breast cancer concludes that exposure to chemicals and radiation may be contributing to half of all new cases, or 106,000 breast cancers each year.]

Analysis of 350 studies finds half of cases are unrelated to genetic risk or lifestyle choices

By Douglas Fischer

As many as half of all new breast cancers may be foisted upon women by pollutants in the environment, triggered by such items as bisphenol-A lining tin cans or radiation from early mammograms, according to a review of recent science by two breast cancer groups.

Their report, "State of the Evidence{1}," released Tuesday [Jan. 24], buttresses what many researchers increasingly suspect: that repeated low doses -- particularly in early childhood -- to chemicals normally considered harmless can have a profound effect.

It also suggests that, for half of the 211,240 woman diagnosed with breast cancer in 2005, lifestyle choices and genetics played no role.

"You just can't blame it on lifestyle factors, like when you have children, or if you have children," said Nancy Evans, health science consultant for the Breast Cancer Fund{2} and the report's principle author.

"Half the cases are not explained by genetics or the so-called 'known risk factors.' There's something else going on."

The report, by the San Francisco-based groups Breast Cancer Fund{3} and Breast Cancer Action{4}, analyzed the findings of more than 350 experimental, epidemiologic and ecological studies assessing breast cancer.

Breast cancer rates have climbed steadily in the United States and other industrialized countries since the 1940s. In the U.S., for instance, one in seven women will be diagnosed with breast cancer in her lifetime, almost triple the rate in the 1960s.

Researchers believe less than one in 10 cases occur in women born with a genetic predisposition for the disease. Instead, the report says, recent science makes very clear the cancer arises from a multitude of factors, from slight genetic mutations to altered hormone production to even radiation.

For instance, the report cited a study from Tufts University that found that exposing pregnant mice to extremely low levels of bisphenol-A altered the development of the mammary gland in their offspring at puberty.

And that alteration makes the gland more susceptible to breast cancer, Evans said.

Bisphenol-A, originally developed as a synthetic hormone in the 1930s, today is used as an additive to make plastic shatterproof and to extend the shelf-life of canned goods. Nearly 6 billion pounds are produced annually.

Industry has long maintained there is no evidence repeated low doses of compounds such as bisphenol-A can have such deleterious effects. A legislative effort to ban some of these chemicals from children's toys failed last week after industry scientists argued there was no cause for concern.

"A lot of work has been done on those issues," said Lorenz Romberg, a former U.S. Environmental Protection Agency scientist who now works as a consultant and testified before the Legislature on behalf of the chemical industry last month. "When you look at this body of evidence in total, we didn't find any evidence that there is a marked, repeatable-across-laboratories effect that has any clear scientific standing."

But the report, Evans said, makes clear there is no one culprit for rising breast cancer rates. What happens, for instance, when bisphenol-A or any several estrogen-like synthetic compounds on the market gets combined with the harm from a few low-dose X-rays?

No one knows, but new research{5} from the National Academy of Sciences suggests there is no safe radiation dose: The lowest possible dose still increases cancer risk. Yet the American Cancer Society still recommends women over age 40 have a mammogram, despite evidence such procedures are not effective until women are 50 years old.

"We have to have a replacement for mammography. It's so aggressively promoted, especially for young women," Evans said.

But does the chance of early detection outweigh the risks?

"I'm not saying they should or shouldn't," Evans said. "They need to be aware of the risk. An additional 10 years of radiation is not insignificant."

The report, "State of the Evidence," can be found here{6}. Contact Douglas Fischer at dfischer@angnewspapers.com.

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{1} <http://www.breastcancerfund.org/site/pp.asp?c=kwKXLdPaE&b=1370077>

{2} <http://www.breastcancerfund.org>

{3} <http://www.breastcancerfund.org>

{4} <http://www.bcaction.org/>

{5}

http://www.precaution.org/lib/06/low_level_radiation.051115.htm

{6}

<http://www.breastcancerfund.org/site/pp.asp?c=kwKXLdPaE&b=1370077>

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URL:

http://www.precaution.org/lib/06/us_pirg_report_on_dirty_air.060119.pdf

From: U.S. Public Interest Research Group, Jan. 19, 2006

ONE THIRD OF ALL AMERICANS ARE ENDANGERED BY AIR POLLUTION

Air Pollution Bill Could Make Situation Even Worse

[Rachel's summary: If you are one of the ninety-six million Americans who are exposed to excessive fine-particle air pollution (from diesel engines, coal-fired power plants and automobiles) you might be forfeiting 14 years (or more) of your life, says a new study by U.S. Public Interest Research Group. The good news is, this pollution is absolutely preventable -- all it requires is the political will to toughen our standards and develop clean alternatives.]

By Emily Figdor

WASHINGTON - Ninety-six million Americans -- 32% of the population -- live in areas with unsafe levels of fine particle, or "soot," pollution, according to a new report{1} released Jan. 19 by the U.S. Public Interest Research Group (U.S. PIRG){2}. The report is a comprehensive analysis of levels of fine particle pollution in the U.S. in 2004, based on a survey of state environmental agencies.

"Soot pollution is a serious health risk. Children, senior citizens, and even healthy adults suffer asthma attacks and other health problems from soot pollution," said U.S. PIRG Clean Air Advocate Emily Figdor.

Coal-fired power plants and diesel engines are the largest sources of fine particle pollution.

Fine particle pollution is the nation's deadliest air pollutant -- and one of its most pervasive. Because of their small size, fine particles can bypass the body's natural defenses, such as coughing and sneezing, and lodge deep within the lungs or even pass into the bloodstream, causing serious respiratory and cardiovascular problems, such as asthma attacks, heart attacks, and lung cancer. Fine particle pollution cuts short the lives of tens of thousands of Americans each year, according to EPA.

EPA estimates that particle pollution shortens the lives of its victims by an average of 14 years.

The new report, called "Plagued by Pollution{3}," is based on a U.S. PIRG survey of the environmental agencies in all 50 states and DC. The report looks at all of the instances in

2004 when pollution levels exceeded EPA's two health-based air quality standards for fine particle pollution. EPA's "annual" standard is based on how much fine particle pollution is safe to breathe on a regular, everyday basis, while EPA's "24-hour" standard is based on how much fine particle pollution is safe to breathe on any one day. Both types of exposures are associated with illness and death.

Key findings for 2004 include the following:

** Fine particle pollution exceeded the annual and/or 24-hour health standards in 55 large, mid-sized, and small metro areas in 21 states, exposing 96 million people to this health threat.

** California, Pennsylvania, Utah, Georgia, and Ohio were the states with the worst fine particle pollution.

** Among large metro areas, the Riverside (CA), Pittsburgh, Los Angeles, Atlanta, and Cleveland metro areas ranked highest nationwide for the worst chronic fine particle pollution. The top mid-sized metro areas were the Bakersfield, Salt Lake City, Visalia-Porterville (CA), Fresno, and Lancaster (PA) areas. And the top small metro areas were the Hanford-Corcoran (CA), Macon, Weirton-Steubenville (WV-OH), Rome (GA), and Hagerstown-Martinsburg (MD-WV) areas.

** The metro areas with the most dangerous spikes in fine particle pollution included the Pittsburgh, Riverside, and Los Angeles areas (large metro areas); the Salt Lake City, Provo-Orem (UT), and Bakersfield areas (mid-sized metro areas); and Logan, a small metropolitan area on the border of Utah and Idaho.

Senator Carper of Delaware plans to reintroduce his air pollution bill, the Clean Air Planning Act, within the next few weeks. Unfortunately, as drafted in 2003 (S.843), the bill would weaken or eliminate critical Clean Air Act protections, including the New Source Review (NSR) program, protections for parks and wilderness areas, and the requirement that each and every power plant reduce its mercury emissions to the maximum extent. Because the bill weakens facility-specific requirements, individual power plants could increase their fine particle pollution under the bill, further exacerbating this already pervasive public health problem.

For instance, an analysis of data from EPA's own consultants estimates that eliminating the NSR program for existing power plants would be so significant that it would cut short the lives of 70,000 Americans in the next two decades. The NSR program requires aging power plants to eventually install modern pollution controls.

"To protect public health, Senator Carper should substantially strengthen his bill. Right now, it would make the problem worse and too many Americans already suffer health problems from breathing polluted air," said Figdor.

Emily Figdor, (202) 546-9707

- {1} <http://uspirg.org/uspirg.asp?id2=21416>
- {2} <http://www.uspirg.org/>
- {3} <http://uspirg.org/uspirg.asp?id2=21416>

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URL:
http://www.precaution.org/lib/06/global_warming_killing_millions.051006.htm

From: The Guardian (UK), Oct. 6, 2005

CLIMATE CHANGE AND POLLUTION ARE KILLING MILLIONS, SAYS STUDY

[Rachel's summary: The World Bank says almost 20% of all ill health, worldwide, plus millions of deaths each year, are caused by global warming and by pollution. Furthermore, pollution is holding back economic development.]

Poor sanitation to blame, says World Bank report....

By John Vidal

Almost a fifth of all ill health in poor countries and millions of deaths can be attributed to environmental factors, including climate change and pollution, according to a report{1} from the World Bank. Unsafe water, poor sanitation and hygiene as well as indoor and outdoor air pollution are all said to be killing people and preventing economic development. In addition, says the bank, increasing soil pollution, pesticides, hazardous waste and chemicals in food are significantly affecting health and economies.

More controversially, the report, released yesterday in New York, links cancers to environmental conditions and says global warming has a major impact on health. "For almost all forms of cancer, the risk of contracting this disease can be reduced if physical environments are safe for human habitation and food items are safe for consumption," says the report.

It also cites the spread of malaria and dengue fever as climate change intensifies. Global warming, says the report, is leading to lower yields of some crops and the salination of coastal areas.

"In 2000 more than 150,000 premature deaths were attributed to various climate change impacts, according to the World Health Organisation," it says. While tobacco, alcohol and unsafe sex are still the most likely threats to health in developing countries, rapid urbanisation and the spread of slum conditions are now major hazards, says the report.

"Some 1.1 billion people lack access to safe water and 2.6 billion lack access to safe sanitation. [This leads to] about 4 billion cases of diarrhoea a year, which cause 1.8 million deaths a year, mostly among children under five," it says.

Sanitation, says the bank, which is committed to increasing spending on the environment, is very much "a forgotten problem", with spending on improvements estimated at just \$1bn in 2000 -- less than 10% of that spent on water.

Millions of people who have moved to cities to find work have swapped indoor for outdoor air pollution, suggests the report. Urban air pollution is estimated to cause about 800,000 premature deaths, it says, approaching the number of people affected by indoor air pollution from wood fires in poorly ventilated homes in rural areas.

According to the report, which uses WHO statistics, high concentrations of minute particles released by smoky fires are now responsible for over 1.6 million deaths a year. Acute respiratory infection, largely caused by indoor air pollution, it says, was responsible for 36% of all registered infant deaths in Guatemala between 1997 and 2000.

The report also says manmade chemicals such as pesticides have an increasing impact on the health of poor people. A survey of child labour in several developing countries, it says, found more than 60% of all working children were exposed to hazardous conditions, and more than 25% of these hazards were due to exposure to chemicals

"Without a healthy, productive labour force, we will not have the economic growth that is necessary to ensure a pathway out of poverty. Poor people are the first to suffer from a polluted environment," said Warren Evans, director of the bank's environment department.

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- {1} <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/ENVIRONMENT/0,,contentMDK:20669631~pagePK:210058~piPK:210062~theSitePK:244381,00.html>

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URL:
http://www.precaution.org/lib/06/philanthropy_and_democracy.051012.htm

From: Rachel's News #839, Jan. 26, 2006

PHILANTHROPY AND DEMOCRACY: A VIEW FROM THE U.S.

[Rachel's summary: "Democracy is in crisis in the so-called advanced countries of the world and in the so-called developing countries. Here I will reflect mainly on the United States because I know it best. In other countries the issues of democracy will differ. In most cases with which I am familiar the differences will be matters of degree. But the obligations of the philanthropic sector are the same." -- Stephen Viederman]

By Stephen Viederman[1]*

Hope has two beautiful daughters: Anger and Courage. Anger at the way things are, and courage to change them. -- St. Augustine

The question raised by the organizers of the Philanthropy Australia Conference session October 12, 2005, was this:

"As I see it what is the role of philanthropy in modern democracy?"

My answer:

The role of philanthropy is to help ensure that modern democracy fulfills its obligations to the commonweal by keeping governments and other institutions wielding power, including corporations, the media, and educational institutions, accountable and transparent to all citizens and residents. Philanthropy has a unique opportunity, and therefore responsibility, since it is master of its own resources, and not reliant on outside funding. The ultimate goal must be structural reform and transformation, not simply amelioration of the present situation. It helps by supporting those organizations that are committed in theory and in practice to community, equity, justice, and democracy.

Democracy is more than voting. It requires of us all a commitment to the commonweal, the common good: to justice, equity and community. Julian Burnside, in his opening address to the Philanthropy Australia conference on October 9 spoke eloquently of the need for this when he directed our attention to the needs of the vulnerable, the powerless, and the unpopular.

Democracy is in crisis in the so-called advanced countries of the world and in the so-called developing countries. Here I will reflect on some of the issues and the responses in the United States because I know it best. In other countries the issues confronting democracy will differ. In most cases with which I am familiar these differences will be matters of degree. The responses of philanthropy will also differ. But the obligations of the philanthropic sector I assert are the same.

** Reacting to hurricane Katrina, President Bush stated that the government would do all it could, and called on all Americans to do their part in the recovery and rebuilding. Subsequent actions have shown that the government is not fulfilling its obligations either administratively or financially.

Foundations in the U.S. are supporting rebuilding efforts through local organizations in the affected communities by dealing with structural issues not just charity.

** Federal rules require Government contractors to pay the prevailing wage in the place where the work is done, and to hire locals first. In a series of cost-plus contracts for Katrina cleanup these rules were waived. If these rules had been implemented they would have had a significant social and economic impact on the survivors, and would have reflected

what many believe to be the Government's social compact with its citizens.

Foundations support groups that monitor the actions of government and the press making transparent the opaqueness of government and corporations.

** In October the Government emasculated the inter-governmental National Environmental Justice Advisory Committee (NEJAC) by declaring that race was no longer to be considered an issue in guiding federal agencies in their cleanup of environmental problems. This despite the fact that studies over the last two decades that led to the formation of NEJAC to coordinate the work of all Federal agencies, demonstrate that race is a central factor in environmental issues.

Foundations are supporting constituency-based economic and environmental justice community organizations to reverse this decision, working through their elected public officials and public opinion.

** Law in the U.S does not require voting. The proportion of eligible voters who actually participate in elections is small. Challenges to voting rights are increasing, especially the rights of the poor and people of color. A requirement that voters show picture identification recently adopted by some states in the south is in effect a 'poll tax,' requiring people to prove eligibility (and incur cost to do so) rather than assuming they are eligible. In the November 2005 election for Mayor of New York City, and for the governorship of New Jersey, fewer than 50 percent of eligible voters went to the polls. Voter apathy is strong. The influence of corporate money and lobbyists, the "K Street" phenomena, induces a sense of powerlessness. The cost of elections favors candidates who are among the very rich, like the New York winner, Michael Bloomberg, and the competing candidates for the governorship of New Jersey, who self-financed their bids for office. It also favors candidates with great money raising machines that make big promises to the givers, especially the corporations, to be made good at a later date.

Foundations are supporting nonpartisan voter registration and education on the issues, and get-out-the-vote campaigns.

** Prospects for significant campaign finance reform are stymied by promises made to the rich and powerful, and by the strength of incumbency. As a result some of the very best possible candidates are discouraged from running for public office, at any governance level. Populist commentator Jim Hightower, in the sixties an elected Secretary of Agriculture in Texas, highlighted the problem in the title of his book, *If the gods had meant us to vote they would have given us candidates* (2000).

Foundations are supporting efforts to describe a fair program for campaign finance that does not favor the wealthy, and are actively involved in supporting public education around these issues.

Foundations are also exercising their ownership obligations in the companies in their financial portfolios by filing shareholder resolutions and by voting their proxies requesting companies to publish in their annual reports the recipients of their political contributions.

** The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) recently proposed sweeping changes to the Toxics Release Inventory (TRI), which became law in 1986, and which is the premier environmental regulation credited with providing citizens with the right-to-know and actual information about pollution sources in their neighborhoods. First, EPA has proposed requiring facilities to report their toxic emissions only once every other year instead of every year. Companies would not be required to produce a report covering two years of data -- they would simply get a pass every other year. The second proposal would allow facilities to release ten times as much pollution before triggering requirements to report on the quantity of toxic chemicals released. In response, an industry group, the American Chemistry Council, has launched a major chemical industry public relations campaign claiming that the TRI is not so essential.

Foundations are supporting community-based and national environmental organizations to respond to this effort at emasculating an important tool to protect the health and welfare of communities.

** At the end of October the House of Representatives passed overwhelmingly the Housing Finance Reform Act, which includes a provision that disqualifies nonprofits from receiving affordable housing grants if they have engaged in voter registration and other nonpartisan voter activities, lobbying, or produced "electioneering communications." Organizations applying for the funds are barred from participating in such activities up to 12 months prior to their application, and during the period of the grant even if they use non-federal funds to pay for them. Most troubling, affiliation or association with any entity that has engaged in any of the restricted activities also disqualifies a nonprofit from receiving affordable housing funds under the bill. This is a significant step back from previous rules and regulations.

Foundations are supporting vigorous efforts at public education and mobilization to maintain the right of community and nonprofit organizations to participate in the democratic process.

** The Congress is now (mid-November 2005) considering legislation that would reduce tax rates on the very wealthy while considering cost-cutting offsets in Medicare, student loans, food stamps for the poor, and programs for children, directed toward the poor and middle class. The bi-partisan Congressional Budget office found that similar tax cuts recently enacted have been ineffective in stimulating the economy, the ostensible reason for the tax cuts then and now.

Foundations are supporting public education efforts, advocacy and mobilization to insure that people are aware of

these assaults on the 'safety net' and activated to let their elected representatives know their concerns.

** A foundation working on issues that are perceived as unpopular by the present Administration was told by its lawyer not to engage in policy or strategic discussions by email in order to avoid government eavesdropping. What they are funding is perfectly legal.

The foundation in question is not backing down. In addition, groups of foundations are protesting at this federal-level abridgement of their rights as foundations to act in the public interest supporting causes the present Administration considers unpopular.

** The Administration has been secretly paying pseudo journalists significant amounts of money to report favorably on its initiatives.

Foundations are supporting watchdog groups that are exposing government's efforts to at best confuse, at worst to lie, to the public.

** Corporate power is at an historical peak, and the abuse of that power, including a lack of accountability to shareholders, stakeholder, employees and communities, is considerable.

Foundations are owners of significant corporate assets and some of them use these assets to achieve great corporate accountability and transparency toward the common good. Corporations are the greatest economic force in the world today. Foundations in collaboration with other concerned owners are increasingly filing shareholder resolutions and voting proxies in support of shareholder resolutions that support human rights, the environment, workers, and equal opportunity, among other things. These combined efforts have been successful in changing corporate behavior.

These observations on the state of democracy are not a counsel of despair, as dispiriting as they are. They are rather a call to action for the philanthropic community in the U.S. to provide more support to assist community and watchdog groups hold governments and other powerful organizations at all levels accountable to all citizens and residents of the country, not just to a chosen few. They can help groups to insist on greater transparency on all aspects of government, corporate and other institutional activities.

Foundations in the U.S. can fund community organizing, advocacy and mobilization around public issues, although they cannot fund support for the passage of specific legislation. There are many non-governmental organizations that desperately need support to defend the public good at community, municipal, state and national levels. Foundations support voter education and registration, and 'get out the vote' campaigns. Voting is a basic right in a democracy. Foundations also support public education campaigns around specific issues.

Many foundations in supporting these efforts focus on groups that have real constituencies, grassroots rather than Astroturf. The groups they seek are those where the dialog and decisions are part of a democratic process, to which the group is accountable. This is democratic base building.

Any response to the challenges to democracy requires philanthropy to look inwardly as well. To whom are we accountable? Are we transparent in our relations with grant seekers and the public-at-large? Are our efforts focused on structural and systemic change to protect democracy, or are we satisfied with amelioration of the problems facing our nation, filling in for government?

As the African-American slave, abolitionist and intellectual Frederick Douglass observed in the 19th century: "If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom, yet depreciate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground...Power concedes nothing without a demand."

South African Archbishop and Nobel laureate Desmond Tutu a century later notes: "There can be no neutrality. If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has his foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality."

What philanthropy in the U.S. is doing pales in the face of challenges to democracy today. Social justice philanthropy, a rough measure of what is needed, is estimated to be only about 15 percent of total grantmaking.

Philanthropies in every country will have to assess the problems of democracy in their countries, the political and social culture, and design appropriate responses to protect and nourish democracy. To reframe Julian Burnside's challenge to foundations, democracy cannot survive without inclusion of the vulnerable, the powerless, and the unpopular. Who comes to the table of democracy will decide what

democracy really means. This is the challenge to philanthropy in the U.S. and worldwide.

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* Stephen Viederman is an activist, educator, writer, speaker and consultant on a wide range of issues including sustainability; the social role of higher education; the future of philanthropy and whether it can meet the challenges of democracy and civil society; environmental and economic justice; redefining fiduciary responsibility and issues of social investment; the limits of corporate social responsibility within the context of how we define the economy; population and the environment; and science and public policy. An underlying theme in his work is the problem of effecting long-term institutional change toward a just society. In 2000 Steve retired as President of the New York-based Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation.

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[1] These notes are an expansion of ideas presented at Philanthropy Australia's Conference in Melbourne on October 12, 2005. I am profoundly indebted to PA for their invitation to participate. On October 17 I delivered the Stegley lecture at the Centre for Asian Philanthropy and Social Investment at Swinburne University, "Equity, democracy, community, and philanthropy". The text of that lecture will be available on the Centre's website{1} sometime in February 2006. Since I see these remarks as part of a continuing dialog, reactions as well as comments and critiques are very welcome. Contact me at stevev@igc.org, with "NZ Philanthropy" in the subject line since I have a very active spam blocker.

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{1} <http://www.swinburnepilanthropy.net>

Rachel's Democracy & Health News (formerly *Rachel's Environment & Health News*) highlights the connections between issues that are often considered separately or not at all. The natural world is deteriorating and human health is declining because those who make the important decisions aren't the ones who bear the brunt. Our purpose is to connect the dots between human health, the destruction of nature, the decline of community, the rise of economic insecurity and inequalities, growing stress among workers and families, and the crippling legacies of patriarchy, intolerance, and racial injustice that allow us to be divided and therefore ruled by the few. In a democracy, there are no more fundamental questions than, "Who gets to decide?" And, "How do the few control the many, and what might be done about it?"

As you come across stories that might help people connect the dots please Email them to us at dhn@rachel.org. *Rachel's Democracy & Health News* is published as often as necessary to provide readers with up-to-date coverage of the subject. Editors: Peter Montague - peter@rachel.org; Tim Montague - tim@rachel.org