WE FIRED OBAMA’S CABINET AND APPOINTED OUR OWN.

Bill McKibben • Laura Flanders
Michael Ratner • Nancy Goldstein
Cheri Honkala • Brian Jones
AND MORE!

THE SHADOW TERM
Dear Reader:

This is what you can ask for, this is what you can expect.
We get told this all the time by our liberal friends, pundits on Sunday morning talk shows, lobbyists, politicians: the entire political establishment.

These are the rules. This is how we get things done.
They drum a litany of limits, barriers, and lowered expectations.
We are told, in so many other words, to settle. To buckle down and accept.
In the words of Nina Simone, “They keep on saying ‘Go slow!’”

Unless it’s time to go to war for plunder or bail out the biggest banks from their most recent blunder, slow is the speed and meek are the designs. Our politics are marinated in quiet submission to the dominant order. We are told to project our hopes for change onto Obama, but when it’s time to get the work done, we are instructed to fold our trust into the bureaucracy.

This issue you are holding in your hands is one screaming rejection of all of that. As one presidential term ends and another begins, we want to take this opportunity to reject the pomp of inauguration and reignite the radical imagination.
Instead of settling for empty suits and ugly compromises, we’ve tossed Obama’s cabinet out of White House and reached out to thinkers and doers, those least likely to be nominated but most deserving of being heard and best qualified to make change, and nominated them to our own Shadow Cabinet.

What would happen if the country’s fiercest advocate for the homeless could remake the Department of Housing and Urban Development? Turn to page 14 to see what Cheri Honkala, national coordinator for the Poor People’s Economic Human Rights Campaign, suggests. What would happen if Homeland Security was recreated by someone who has been through some of the country’s harshest prisons, as a prisoner himself? See page 3 for how Andy Stepanian would remake the department. Bill McKibben, on the frontlines fighting global climate change, doesn’t think he’d last that long as the secretary of energy, but turn to page 10 to see what he’d push before he was fired. And that’s just a few of the voices here.

We can demand more, more than what is asked for in this issue. We need to conjure up new expectations, create better politics, to think and act on all of this. Here are some ideas for you to read, whether on the subway home after a long day of work or on the bus to a protest. The time is now. There’s a lot to get done.

With love,
Your guest editors,
Anna Gold and Sam Alcoff

We would like to thank the contributors and illustrators, as well as the regular Indypendent production staff who patiently let us take the helm for an issue.

community calendar

SAT JAN 26 12:30pm • Sliding scale CLASS: KID REPORTERS WRITING AND REPORTING WORKSHOP. Indykids newspaper is offering a workshop to kids ages 9-13. Kids work alongside professional journalists to research, write and edit articles about current events and social justice. Two additional workshops will be held at the same time on Feb. 2, Feb. 9 and Feb. 16. For location information and to RSVP, contact info@indykids.org.

WED JAN 30 6:30–8pm • Free A LEGAL WORKSHOP FOR LESBIANS, GAY, BISEXUAL, TWO-SPRINT, TRANS, INTERSEX & GENDER NON-CONFIRMING IMMIGRANTS. Food, Metrocards and Spanish interpretation available. RSVP by Jan 28.

FRI FEB 1 8pm • Free PERFORMANCE/EXHIBITION: LANGSTON HUGHES: THE BLACK CLOTH EXHIBITION. Artwork in his exhibition is multimedia presentation full of black art on pastels that give life to Aladego Mwalu Musa and Ronaldo David’s shared interpretations of iconic works. Brecht Forum

SAT FEB 16 8pm • $17 PERFORMANCE: PEARLS OF WISDOM; HARMONIC INSURGENCE. The People’s Voice Cafe celebrates 32 years of peace and resistance.

RE-IGNITE THE RADICAL IMAGINATION (A brief note from the guest editors)
In the weeks between my appointment and when I entered this office I had the privilege of spending several days along side former Secretary Janet Napolitano. I found Secretary Napolitano’s leadership to be exemplary as applied to the terms defining her position as DHS secretary. These terms, framed 11 days after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, provide a foundation for what it means to direct our Department of Homeland Security. However, I regretfully, and respectfully, submit to you today, that these terms upon which we apply the responsibility of securing of our homeland are flawed. I intend to spend my term as secretary redefining these terms, and eventually redefining the position of secretary to the Department of Homeland Security.

With no disrespect intended to Secretary Napolitano, I will share with you a conversation she and I had regarding these aforementioned terms.

When I asked Secretary Napolitano to recall her first days in office, she waxed nostalgic about a conversation she had in 2009 with her predecessor, Secretary Michael Chertoff, about “the cornerstone of our security apparatus.” This “cornerstone” was handed down from Tom Ridge to Chertoff to Napolitano. When I asked her what this “cornerstone” was she simply replied, “the enemization of everything.”

Over the past nine-and-a-half years, this department has grown exponentially to employ more than 240,000 Americans around a principle that in order to inoculate our population against an attack by an invisible enemy we must first enemize everything, treating each and every living thing (and at times even non-living electronic entities) as if she, he, they or it were plotting the next attack on our homeland. The private sector has also seen unfettered growth around its ability to monetize “the enemization of everything,” from developing security technologies in response to unforeseen “enemies” to using the specter of terrorism to draft and fast-track model legislation that serves business interests.

While taking a position that everything is an “enemy” can make it harder for an “enemy” to execute his or her plans, it also creates an ugly, fear-driven environment that sows seeds of distrust, from misplaced suspicions about your neighbor’s religious or political affiliations to fears of crowds or airplanes. Moreover, this “enemization of everything” has been observed to have a profound psychological impact on some individuals. For some, being told over and over by peers or media that they are “an enemy” makes them want to react by becoming that enemy. After surviving a decade rife with violent outbursts and mass shootings, we as a nation cannot afford to ignore the psychological impacts of our post-9/11 terror culture and security-industrial complex on the moral fabric of our communities.

I intend to use my directorship here at the Department of Homeland Security to transform this agency into a restorative agency. To do so we must first undo this prerequisite “enemization” model. We then need to reach an understanding that terrorism, whether political or apolitical like a shooting in a movie theater, almost always has an origin. These origins should be treated as wounds that we as an agency have a responsibility to heal. If we as an agency can isolate these origins on various cultural, systematic or personal levels, we can begin to heal the wounds that jeopardize our security.

Many of my detractors have speculated about how, in my position, I would rewrite the script of “enemization” to an American story of empathy and healing. From deeply personal individual battles with cancer to the global war on terror, human responses to these acute onslaughts are almost always reactionary and seldom preventive.

Amid the immediacy of our tragedies we rarely question what brought us to those malignant moments; instead we desperately reach for quick fixes — surgery, chemother apy, torture, drones, carpet-bombing. In the global war on terror, preventative medicine is often practiced as pre-emptive military action, rendition, entrapment, torture and sanctions. These means never challenge the cultural roots of the problem and often serve as a tool for terrorist recruitment.

Like flourishing bacterial cultures in a petri dish, terrorism is a symptomatic cultural reflex that can be easily seen growing out of its own hospitable environments. Oppression, poverty, inadequate education, constant subjugation to the accepted institutionalized abuse of animals and a lack of individual autonomy are the stagnant waters in which this global disease of terrorism takes root and grows. As secretary, I intend to use this agency to analyze, isolate and ultimately treat the prerequisite events that give way to future acts of violence.

To make this agency a restorative agency, not only must we speak in a restorative manner, but our actions and our policies must also promote restoration.

Many of my detractors have speculated about my proposed policy changes, some have gone as far as to call them “treasonous.” I will reserve any comments regarding my policy plans for a later date, but can assure those detractors that I fully intend to re-write their script of “enemization” to an American story of empathy and healing.

Sincerely,

Andy Stepanian
Secretary
Department of Homeland Security

Andy Stepanian is the co-founder of SparrowMedia.net and a SHAC 7 defendant who served three years in federal prison on terrorism-related charges.
1. Handcuff the FBI not activists. Protect our right to dissent and protest by ending FBI surveillance, spying, wiretapping, racial and ethnic profiling, use of informants and entrapment of activists and others not engaging in criminal activity.

2. No criminal prosecutions of those involved in the sale or personal use of all drugs. Recommend the immediate parole of all persons jailed for crimes relating to drugs.

3. Recommend parole for tens of thousands in federal prisons including those convicted as juveniles, political prisoners such as Native American activist Leonard Peltier and those serving more than 20 years. Those remaining should be treated humanely (no solitary), and given educational programs. Ultimately, prisons must be abolished. “When the prison doors are opened, the real dragon will fly out.” — Ho Chi Minh

4. No prosecution of the undocumented. No more criminal enforcement of immigration laws including Operation Streamline, which has resulted in criminal prosecution and jail sentences for scores of thousands of immigrants.

5. End the prosecution of truth tellers and internet activists. Bradley Manning, Jeremy Hammond, Julian Assange, Barrett Brown, the late Aaron Swartz and untold others who seek to expose criminality and challenge corporate control of information which should be free to all.

6. Don’t enforce the tax laws against those forced to carry the burden for the rich. The attorney general cannot change the tax code, but can refuse enforcement of its unequal burden. No criminal prosecution or civil enforcement actions against people or families who earn under $40,000 and who refuse to pay taxes. Tax the rich, not those with lower incomes.

7. Indict and prosecute Obama and administration officials for murder by targeted assassination. A federal judge recently said, in the context of the drone killing of Anwar Al-Awlaki, that the President could be subject to prosecution under a U.S. statute prohibiting “foreign murder of United States nationals.”

8. Indict and prosecute the George W. Bush torture team. Bush, Dick Cheney, former CIA head George Tenet, scores of others and the lawyers such as Alberto Gonzales and by Anatole France’s oft-quoted remark that the law in all its majesty forbids all persons, whether rich or poor, from sleeping under bridges. With socialism in America, the people will own the bridges, and they’ll sleep peacefully and contentedly with a roof over their heads knowing full well that they have created a society where the law won’t work against them and in the words of that great man-ifesto ‘where the full development of each is the condition of the full development of all.”

Michael Ratner is an attorney, president emeritus of the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR), and co-author of Hell No: Your Right to Dissent in 21st-Century America.
charged with protecting U.S. citizens abroad, and yet the President asserts the right to attack and kill anyone on suspicion (including U.S. citizens) anywhere at any time. You see the challenge.

It is not easy to win respect and influence people in countries whose first association with the United States is with a thousand sprawling military bases, proliferating intelligence agencies, wiretaps, extraordinary renditions, the dungeon of Guantanamo, and a shadowy cast of “advisors” and “trainers.” The calm tones of diplomacy are drowned out by the din of drone attacks.

Don’t worry too much about international law, I hear you say. The United States hasn’t signed very much of the stuff. Of course, you’re right. (Not that signing matters. We are a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights yet we violate it daily as matter of principle and as a matter of course. We tolerate mass hunger, unemployment and the death penalty in promotion of “individual responsibility” and steadily suppress wages and workers’ rights in the United States and around the world to boost private profits.)

Still, it’s embarrassing how many worthy treaties on the rights of the child, land mines, cluster bombs, small arms, even discrimination against women, lie unratified, even unsigned. The doctrine of American exceptionalism and “Do As We Say, Not As We Do” is a hard sell for our diplomatic corps.

Aside from the United States’ own wars and occupations, the prime causes of insecurity in the past few years have been global financial institutions, some based in the United States. By its own definition, U.S. foreign policy is intended “to create a more secure democratic and prosperous world for the benefit of American people and the international community.” Yet the pursuit of prosperity for some has made much of the world more insecure and less democratic. For a generation of non-state actors, terrorists and armed insurgents, it was Goldman Sachs not Al Qaeda that brought the Greek economy to the brink by increasing and covering up that state’s debts while making a massive private profit. Financial speculation by (among others) U.S.-based Wells Fargo fueled price fluctuations and food shortages that sparked riots in more than 30 countries in 2007-08, and the overthrow of Haiti’s government, before prices peaked again in February 2011, during the Arab Spring.

Is diplomats’ power any match for Wall Street? Global financial institutions are famously “too big to jail.” There was no time served by the mortgage mobsters who tricked a generation out of its wealth. There will be no life sentence without parole for the executives of HSBC, even when they have been found laundering cash for narco-terrorists. Those global players don’t attend diplomatic conferences. Likewise, there’s no bite (and barely any bark) in the office of secretary of state when it comes to the destabilizing effect of global trade, even when unscrupulous financial trading practices are prime threats to peace and human rights.

Give us back the wars of yore. The rogue state that invaded its neighbor was a whole lot easier to rein in than Coca Cola or Shell or Motorola. Impoverished nations will sell water, fuel and minerals to the highest bidder, and why shouldn’t they? Beholden to the same breed of corporations, the United States opposes climate regulations. If global warming is not seen as a threat to national security, why should smaller states worry about resource wars?

Besides, why would anyone worry about peace? The United States talks peace but triples weapons sales. Overseas arms sales total $66.3 billion in 2011 (more than three quarters of the global arms market), driven by major sales to authoritarian Persian Gulf states. A $30 billion deal with Saudi Arabia was hailed by the secretary of state’s office as a boon for security and by Barack Obama as good for American jobs. By this standard, the true American crisis would be a decrease in military spending or a decline in global conflict.

The reality is that the world is very different from what it was when Thomas Jefferson served as the first secretary of state or from 1648 when the Peace of Westphalia first articulated the sovereignty of the nation-state. George Washington in his farewell address urged the United States to steer clear of “inveterate antipathies” or “permanent alliances.” We now have both, most notably in the Middle East. The Israel lobby would have hated our first president.

Secretaries representing individual states aren’t well suited to today’s biggest problems. As the Capital Institute’s John Fullerton told me recently, “Three-and-a-half centuries later, with the rise of globalization in business, a global interconnected financial system, non-state terrorist actors with the power to upset global security, global epidemics and global environmental threats, Westphalian principles, like the Newtonian physics of its time, are no longer adequate.”

At the start of the last century novelist and essayist Virginia Woolf wrote, “As a woman I have no country. As a woman my country is the world.” That is even more true today. To quote author and foreign policy analyst Phyllis Bennis, the task is to “redefine what makes us safer: not bigger armies, more nukes, bigger corporations wreaking havoc in other countries being afraid of us.” Interdependent states need to tackle global threats together. And perhaps stability shouldn’t be our sine qua non goal. After all, security is an illusion, as Eve Ensler of One Billion Rising and V-Day says, when one in three women will experience sexual assault or rape in her lifetime. If the status quo has brought us this far, why do we want more of the same?

Maybe the best place for a secretary of state is here at home. We need a secretary who clears the diplomatic air by delivering up U.S. war criminals for prosecution. As the “war on terror” is without definition or jurisdiction, the jury for such a case should similarly be global. How about American Anti-Idol live, online and let the world set the sentence?

Want to reduce poverty and hunger, make the world a less precarious place? When it comes to global “gun violence,” the National Rifle Association and its corporate partners can’t hold a candle to the Pentagon and theirs. We need a secretary not of state but of the people. Now that might be something worth talking about.

Laura Flanders is the founder and director of GRITtv and a contributing writer to The Nation.
A new Secretary of Education will reverse the trend toward the privatization of the public schools, to end the pervasive climate of fear and demoralization among the nation’s educators and to urgently promote desegregation and genuine equality of resources and opportunity in all K-12 schools.

I will seek an immediate repeal of No Child Left Behind legislation and of the Race to the Top competition. Together, these have raised the stakes of standardized testing and a moratorium on school closings. Just as we commit ourselves to teaching every single student, we will likewise commit ourselves to improving every single school.

Teachers must be trained in the very best practices and must be given the opportunity to learn from experienced educators during their training. In our highest-needs municipalities, students only rarely have teachers who are from their community, and teacher turnover is high. Teachers from the community must not be the model of teacher training for our schools. Therefore, I will seek an end to Teach for America contracts with municipalities nationwide. Shortages must be addressed by strengthening our schools of education and by developing pathways to train community members to serve as educators in their schools.

We know that children learn best in stress-free, relaxed environments where they are given the opportunity to construct their own knowledge and understanding through meaningful, collaborative work. This requires clean, safe, attractive physical surroundings, small class sizes, well-trained educators and generous support services for students in need. There is no reason for these services to be provided by charity.

As school funding remains a profound cause of educational inequality, I will direct my staff to prepare proposals for immediate revisions of tax codes that currently punish educators and generous support services for families in need. There is no reason for these services to be provided by charity. Like public education itself, the health of families is a matter of the public good and should be included in the public budget.

The United States of America is the wealthiest nation in human history. It is my firm belief that, by changing our priorities, we can afford to pursue these initiatives and many more.

Brian Jones has taught elementary grades in New York City’s public schools for nine years, and is a member of the Movement of Rank and File Educators (the social justice caucus of the United Federation of Teachers). Brian is a doctoral student in urban education at the CUNY Graduate Center, and has contributed to trade books, policy papers on Education and Capitalism: Struggles for Learning and Liberation.

Linda Alcoff is a professor of philosophy at the City University of New York (CUNY) and the current president of the American Philosophical Association Eastern Division. She attended Brown as a fully funded graduate student, sorely impressed by the superior vocabulary of her students.

Semiotics for All!
A NEW OPENING

My first act as Obama’s new head of the Office of Public Engagement and Intergovernmental Affairs would be to heed the drum that a vast array of LGBT and human rights activists pounded all last year and put some dammed LGBT non-discrimination policies in place, as Obama has failed to do despite his 2008 campaign promises. (Yes, DADT is certainly a fine beginning, but it took him until the third year of his first term to get on it, activists had to push him uphill the entire way, and it still allows discrimination against transgender servicemembers.)

The President could start by signing the executive order he refused to sign last April — the one that would ban federal contractors from discriminating against employees based on sexual orientation or gender identity. Of course, his inaction ticked off activists like Heather Cronk, managing director of GetEQUAL!, who calls it “shameful that the United States government still chooses to accept the premise that it’s okay to fire someone simply for being lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender.” But preventing taxpayer-funded workplace discrimination is such a no-brainer that even the New York Times Editorial page was peeved by the president’s punting.

As political strategist Paul Yandura and blogger Joe Sudbay noted in a recent post, “This executive order has been awaiting his signature for over two years now. He could do it this week, and it would be a historic first step toward federal employment protections.” It would also, according to Tico Almeida, President of the LGBT organization Freedom to Work, “give the U.S. Labor Department strong enforcement powers to seek back wages and reinstatement for LGBT workers who are fired for discriminatory reasons.”

Just as important are the ways that the executive order would, as Yandura told me, provide “the smartest step and best pathway we have toward passage of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act.” ENDA would offer the broadest possible protections for transgender and nonconforming people and has been languishing in Congress since 1994. As of now, only 16 states and the District of Columbia have statutes that protect against both sexual orientation and gender identity discrimination in employment in the public and private sector. And, as Almeida pointed out, “The order will also trigger national news stories pointing out congressional inaction on this issue, and that will help our movement with one of our biggest ENDA hurdles — the fact that 90 percent of Americans mistakenly believe ENDA has already become law.”

Yandura also noted that the existing executive orders that protect minorities but exclude LGBT Americans, originated years ago such a no-brainer that even the president’s punting.

Before Congress got it together to pass federal legislation and were the impetus for that change. These orders create a strong foundation for legislation later passed by Congress. According to Nan Hunter, a lesbian law professor at Georgetown University, “History has shown executive orders for non discrimination often precede changes in law.” So there is a strong historic precedent for signing a similar order to protect LGBT Americans to create a pathway to passage of ENDA. Moreover, if the President signs a revised executive order now, almost a quarter of the U.S. workforce will have already lived under similar LGBT employment protections by the time ENDA does finally come up for a vote. That should go a long way toward undercutting any fear-based arguments used against it by homophobic and transphobic lawmakers.

So good morning, Mr. President, and welcome to your second term. I super appreciate this new gig and the free seltzer in the OPE kitchen. And now I’ve got some papers for you to sign.

Nancy Goldstein’s work has appeared in venues including the Guardian, The Nation, the Daily Beast, NPR, Politico, Salon, Slate, the American Prospect and the Washington Post, where she was an Editor’s Pick and the winner of the blogging round during their Next Great Pandit Contest. You can follow her on Twitter @nancygoldstein.

As Chairman of the FCC, I will revoke the corporate charter of any corporation that is involved in both selling internet/cable services and the infrastructure of providing those services. I will insist that state governments take over providing the infrastructure and they will be required to use open-source forward-and backward-compatible technology. By taking the profit incentive out of commerce for infrastructure, we will expand coverage to serve everyone, keep local funds in the community and lock out any company that violates censorship or ratecettering regulations. We will create jobs building this expanded infrastructure, while receiving revenue from renting it to cable and internet providers. Everyone involved with policing the airwaves for sex and language violations will be transitioned into enforcing truth-in-advertising regulations, on the grounds that free speech is not the right to intentionally lie to the public. Political campaign or policy lobby ads will no longer be allowed under any circumstances.
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TRUE CITIZENSHIP

THE BIG ICE THAW

ARLENE DAVIDA
DIRECTOR
IMMIGRATION AND CUSTOMS ENFORCEMENT

My first order of business as director of ICE during Obama’s second-term cabinet is to immediately ban the use of “illegal” to refer to any undocumented person of any status in this country in any official and unofficial communication. ICE strongly believes that inhumane language devalues our mission and should be immediately eradicated. By the same token, racist anti-immigration provisions that promote racial profiling and criminalize people just for living while “undocumented” — such as such as Alabama’s HB 56 and Arizona’s SB 1070 — will be rendered unconstitutional.

We will instantly turn to developing a comprehensive immigration reform that will adjust the status of the undocumented to “permanent residents” and that provides a realistic, feasible and affordable path to U.S. citizenship to all undocumented immigrants. The Dream Act will be immediately approved, without preconditions of military service or enrollment in an institution of higher learning.

Foremost, the new ICE is aware that people leave their countries out of economic need and desperation, and we will work closely with other branches of government to develop fair global economic policies that allow sustainable livelihoods for all. This includes fair-trade agreements that do not compete unfairly with rural and agricultural workers as did NAFTA and that do not decimate local industries. In particular, global corporations seeking to invest in the developing world will be required to provide living wages and safe working environments to workers. Additionally, the new ICE is committed to avoiding future foreign invasions and interventions in the name of profit, capital and U.S. corporations in order to avoid generating more “harvests of empire,” as Juan Gonzalez terms immigrants.

Finally, our Border Enforcement Security will be retrained to help with the task of family reunification and status adjustment of immigrants, prioritizing the victims of the unprecedented number of deportations initiated under Obama’s first term. We estimate that after we achieve economic stability across the border the work of the Border Enforcement Security will become largely expendable.

Arlene Davila writes about Latino/Latin American contemporary issues and teaches anthropology and American Studies at New York University.

END THE ILLUSION OF CHOICE

BEN MANSKI
DIRECTOR
FEDERAL ELECTION COMMISSION

Did you, too, O friend, suppose democracy was only for elections, for politics, and for a party name? I say democracy is only of use there that it may pass on and come to its flower and fruit in manners, in the highest forms of interaction between [people], and their beliefs — in religion, literature, colleges and schools — democracy in all public and private life...”

— WALT WHITMAN

Until now, the United States has had no federal agency primarily responsible for the strengthening of domestic democracy. We therefore reform the existing Federal Elections Commission into a new Federal Democracy Commission, whose mandate is fourfold:

- Convening of constitutional conventions at least once every 30 years so as to ensure that the basic law of these United States is the law of the living, not the dead. Currently, such a convention may be initiated at the request of the states. Until the Constitution may be amended so as to make constitutional reform a more regular practice, the role of the Federal Democracy Commission in the convening of constitutional conventions shall be to encourage and make transparent the existing amendment process.

- The implementation and enforcement of the Voter Bill of Rights, as enacted by Congress, as well as existing voting rights and election laws. The Voter Bill of Rights is a 10-point consensus platform of the modern day voting rights movement and may be read in its current incarnation at nomorestolenelections.org.

- Ensuring federal support for the principles of democratic federalism, in which environmental, human rights, education, and commercial laws and regulations enacted by our national government are understood to establish a floor, not a ceiling, to actions by our state and local governments. This means, for example, that the Federal Democracy Commission will intervene to ensure that the federal government will encourage local and state reforms such as public utilities, community wireless, wage and hour minimums, clean water, human rights, and standards and services that are more ambitious than those offered by higher levels of government.

- Strengthening the practice of economic democracy through public education, publicity, training and direct financing for cooperative development and for democratic reforms intended to make government agencies, private associations, and business enterprises more participatory.

The Federal Democracy Commission is an independent, nonpartisan regulatory agency. Its six commissioners are nonpartisan, meaning that those who have run for partisan offices, worked for a political party, or served as an officer of a registered political party may not serve as commissioners. The commission members are nominated by a select committee that includes one representative of each political party that has won at least 1 percent of the national vote in the previous election cycle. Those nominated are then appointed by the President and approved by Congress.

Ben Manski is the executive director of the Liberty Tree Foundation for the Democratic Revolution, a pro-democracy strategy center he founded in 2004. He is a former co-chair of the Green Party of the United States, and this past year was Jill Stein’s presidential campaign manager. Manski will serve as the executive secretary of the Federal Democracy Commission administrative, as he is disqualified from serving as a commissioner.
C
an you imagine a food system that is centered around the local and region-
al production of healthy food for all people? I can, and as secretary of Agriculture I will pursue transformative policies that are framed by the overlapping contexts of climate change, inequality, racism, corporate domina-
tion and the need for food democracy. Signifi-
cant defunding of the present military budget by my new colleagues at the Pentagon should provide sufficient support for the changes we need to make.

The current food and agricultural system contributes one-third of all greenhouse gas-
es, so we must change how we grow, process and distribute food. As we strengthen local and regional food production, we will swift-
ly transition away from agriculture that re-
quires fossil fuel-based pesticides and fertil-
izers. Subsidies to massive monocrop/heavy input farms will be shifted to medium-sized and small farms using agro-ecological prac-
tices. Programs supporting sustainable ag-
iculture and diverse scales of farms need to grow, such as specialty crop, beginning farmer, organic and value-added programs.

Guided by the principle of “food sov-
erignty” — control of our food system by the people within a community — medium-
sized and small farms are more able to incor-
porate agro-ecological practices and to meet the needs of their local food economies. The overproduction of corn, soy, wheat and rice (most of which are genetically engineered and require enormous amounts of water to irrigate) will end with the sunset of subsidies for these commodity crops. This will elimi-
nate the de facto subsidy to concentrated livestock farming. Confined Animal Factory Operations (CAFOs) doing inhumane treatment and growth hormone- and anti-
biotic-laced feed will be phased out within a short time. The official policy of the USDA will be to gradually wean ourselves off heavy meat consumption; meat production will be to gradually wean ourselves off short time. The official policy of the otic-laced feed will be phased out within a treatment and growth hormone- and antibi-

Food Policy Councils (FPCs) must be established and supported in all cities and counties and should be connected through state FPC networks. These councils will in-
clude community, farmer, worker, govern-
ment and business interests with the heavi-
est representation from marginalized groups most affected by our present broken food system. These councils will contribute to planning a more localized food system that meets the needs of the people in the region: food sovereignty!

The survival and security of our people and our nation depend upon the food and nutri-
tion security of everyone on the planet. The United States can lead in the development of sound food policies that support this goal. We can minimize climate change, adapt to it as it unfolds, create a more equitable society and live more harmoniously with nature, the ultimate judge and jury of our fates. We can set an example and bring these practices to international agreements supported by the United Nations and other international bod-
ies. We have a world to save and we can do a great deal of that through food and agricul-
ture led by our communities and supported by our government.
ONE THING BEFORE I'M FIRED

BILL MCKIBBEN
SECRETARY
DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

Now that I’ve been named secretary of energy, let me tell you my first order of business: no more booting the fossil fuel industry. We’re done being the enablers of the coal and gas and oil industry, and we’re ready to tell the truth to the American people about the damage they’re doing to communities, to landscapes, and most of all to the climate.

I can’t get this done before I’m fired, so I’ll try to help strike opposition to the Keystone XL pipeline. I know I serve at the President’s pleasure, but I serve at my pleasure too, until simply can’t be part of an administration that will approve a project opposed by all the nation’s top climate scientists, a project that will help open up a vast new source of carbon, a project that will put more money into the pockets of the Koch brothers.

Once the President has blocked Keystone, he’ll have real credibility with powerful movements that would engage militantly in what he taskId a “march on the magic carpet” in the 1970s. The Environmental Protection Agency has been a political football since its founding in 1970, kicked back and forth between liberal environmentalism and big business, the latter quota concern to vacate civilization and nature in the altar of profit, the former tempering and subliding away at the edge of imaginativeness. With the recent resignation of Administrator Lisa Jackson, the struggle enters a new phase of danger and opportunity: the hallmarks of crisis.

I can go a long way toward realigning our economy. Capitalists create unemployment and also see the threat of further unemployment to prevent the mending of ecological damage by saying that this would take away jobs. Somehow it’s forgotten that an energy transformation to a solar-based economy requires a whole lot of work — and that the jobs to carry this out can be had through the taking down of the old, carbon-based economy. The government has a role to play here, but only if it stands on the side of the workers and the earth. There’s a brief moment in 40 years of climate action to get this right.

We will also invest $20 billion of FEMA’s massive war chest into the rebuilding of New York City. We will also reinstate urban homesteading laws to permit the immediate use of any property that has stood vacant for more 10 years. We will also invest $10 billion of FEMA’s New York City budget in clean energy technological and infrastructural transformation with the goal of powering 30 percent of residential properties using wind and solar energy and a separate collective to help households that lost their homes in the storm. And we will act tighter employment quotas for all contract workers receiving FEMA funds; 80 percent of companies receiving FEMA funds: 80 percent of those workers must be local, 50 percent must be union, and 50 percent must be minoritycontrolled.

As we’re dealing with our own troubles, we also have to get back into the international conversation: We’re not going to be leaders any time soon, but at least we can stop being the caboose on the train. (Speaking of trains, we need some of those too!)

An outline of the strategy:

1. The Environmental Protection Agency has been a political football since its founding in 1970, kicked back and forth between liberal environmentalism and big business, the latter quota concern to vacate civilization and nature in the altar of profit, the former tempering and subliding away at the edge of imaginativeness. With the recent resignation of Administrator Lisa Jackson, the struggle enters a new phase of danger and opportunity: the hallmarks of crisis.

2. Begin moving to the carbon tax that many countries around the world are initiating. The EPA has a gun at its head, able to insti- tute this. Combine it with elimination of the wasteful “cap-and-trade” schemes that has served to mystify the possibilities of neighborly state action. A tax of $125 per ton of carbon could raise $232 billion.

3. Set aside a portion of this to protect poor communities — especially poor communities — from the effects of soot and ozone and the asthma that comes with burning coal. A serious fee-and-dividend would help out. This would include vigilance and perseverance to prevent the mending of ecological damage by saying that this would take away jobs.

4. With powerful new EPA regulations to reinstitute urban homesteading laws to permit the immediate use of any property that has stood vacant for more than 10 years. We will also invest $10 billion of FEMA’s New York City budget in clean energy technological and infrastructural transformation with the goal of powering 30 percent of residential properties using wind and solar energy and a separate collective to help households that lost their homes in the storm.

5. The Indypendent

6. We can play a major role in the transition, which is not incidental, of the climate change apocalypse: efficient renewables extraction, especially in deeper waters, mounting internal coal mining, hydroelectricity for natural gas, and wind farms extraction and transport for Keystone XL, from Alberta to Texas, from Mexico to Texas, and wherever else these pro- cesses will occur. The EPA has plenty of tools to put to the lobbing these mandates to government. And also use the threat of further unemploy- ment to prevent the mending of ecological damage by saying that this would take away jobs. Somehow it’s forgotten that an energy transformation to a solar-based economy requires a whole lot of work — and that the jobs to carry this out can be had through the taking down of the old, carbon-based economy. The government has a role to play here, but only if it stands on the side of the workers and the earth. There’s a brief moment in 40 years of climate action to get this right.

7. A feed-in tariff system modeled on Germany’s, which has installed so much renewable energy that makes it clear we own the sky, not Exxon — and that finally puts a real price on carbon.

8. A serious fee-and-dividend that would engage militantly in what it stood for to do protect the environment. This would include vigilance and perseverance to prevent the mending of ecological damage by saying that this would take away jobs. Somehow it’s forgotten that an energy transformation to a solar-based economy requires a whole lot of work — and that the jobs to carry this out can be had through the taking down of the old, carbon-based economy. The government has a role to play here, but only if it stands on the side of the workers and the earth. There’s a brief moment in 40 years of climate action to get this right.

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EPA that would engage militantly in what it’s supposed to do: protect the environment. This would include vigilance and perseverance in enforcing the existing regulations to limit contaminants in the air, water or soil. But there is a much bigger challenge before us. It’s nothing less than an energy transformation, bringing down the carbon-based sources that spell climate doom and replacing them with solar-based renewables. A vitalized EPA can play a major role in the transition, which, not incidentally, can go a long way toward restoring our economy. Capitalists create unemployment and also use the threat of further unemployment to prevent the mending of ecological damage by saying that this would take away jobs. Somehow it is forgotten that an energy transformation to a solar-based economy requires a whole lot of work — and that the jobs to carry this out can be funded through the taking down of the old, carbon-based economy. The government has a role to play here, but only if it stands on the side of the economy. The government has a role to play, as the heads of Federal Emergency Management Agency, will construct a wind farm in the water off the eastern coast of the city as part of our comprehensive New York City reconstruction plan. To jump-start reconstruction, all residents in affected areas with children under the age of 18 or elderly or disabled family members will immediately receive a $20,000 voucher to do repairs and mold remediation to avoid long-term illnesses. This plan will also enact a one-year moratorium on evictions, foreclosures and residential property sales in affected areas in order to forestall vulture capitalism. (FEMA loans will be made available to assist landlords if they can demonstrate considerable financial hardship as a result of the moratorium.) In order to alleviate the housing and displacement crisis, we will also place pressure on the mayor’s office to begin an immediate count of all vacant properties within city limits, as well as pressure the city council to reinstate urban homesteading laws to permit the immediate use of any property that has stood vacant for more than 10 years.

We will also invest $20 billion of FEMA’s New York City budget in green energy technology and infrastructure with the goal of powering 20 percent of residential properties using wind and solar energy on a separate collective energy grid by 2015. The agency will also enact tighter employment quotas for all contract companies receiving FEMA funds: 80 percent of the workers must be local, 50 percent must be of color and 40 percent must be women. FEMA will spend $30 million on daycare centers and after-school programs in affected communities. Furthermore, we immediately change the agency’s policy toward undocu-
mated persons, who will now be entitled to receive full FEMA assistance.

We are, to put it bluntly, at war, a war for the future of our species and innumerable others. Climate change is the most spectacular threat, but not by any means the only one. So let’s play a war game using the possibilities of another time.

1. Clamp down on the “four horsemen” of the climate change apocalypse: offshore petroleum extraction, especially in deeper waters; mountaintop removal coal mining; hydrofracking for natural gas; and tar sands extraction and transport by Keystone XL, from Alberta to Texas now, and wherever else these processes will occur. The EPA has plenty of tools to put the kibosh on these murderous technologies. All it takes is some Principled action. There are lots of activists who would help out.

2. Begin moving to the carbon tax that many countries around the world are initiating. The EPA has a shot at being able to initiate this. Combine it with elimination of the worthless “cap-and-trade” system that has served to mystify the possibilities of enlightened state action. A tax of $20/ton of carbon could raise $125 billion.

3. Set aside a portion of this to protect poor and working people from the higher prices of carbon fuels.

4. Combine the rest with $100 billion raised through cuts in the military — the most wasteful and toxic part of society. Now we have a nice sum with which to do something worthwhile.

5. Use the funds to create a national program, substantially planned and administered locally, to transition to an energy grid of solar and wind power.

6. Obama might stand in the way. But (like FDR) hasn’t he urged us to present him with powerful movements that would compel him to act?

There will be a lot of details to work out. It will be exciting and, for a big change, hope-ful. It could even lead to a revolution. And isn’t that what many of us have been asking for?

A FRESH BREATH OF CLEAN AIR

Joel Kovel is author of The Enemy of Nature and a founder of Ecosocialist Horizons (ecosocialisthorizons.com)

REBUILDING THE REBUILDERS

Diego Ibanez and Laura Gottesdiener
Co-Directors, Federal Office of Emergency Management

REBUILDING THE REBUILDERS

Diego Ibanez is an organizer with Occupy Sandy. Laura Gottesdiener is a freelance journalist and one of the co-producers of Sandy Storyline (sandystoryline.com).

Joel Kovel is director of Environmental Protection Agency

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MIDDLE EAST

BREAKING UP WITH ISRAEL

REMI KANAZI
Special Envoy to Palestine and Israel

Israel is an apartheid state but you know this bulldozing homes, displacing the indigenous expanding settlements, checkpoints, and colonizer roads controlling imports, exports, the air, the sea, and “buffer zones” firing at fishermen, gunning down children shelling ambulances and buildings filled with journalists this is what emboldened occupiers do with our protection you are the commander and chief weapons supplier veto inside and outside of the U.N. the billion-dollar best friend continuing a corrupted legacy laid out by presidents who came before you what oppressors learn from history is to repeat it build upon its cruelty we don’t need to transport ourselves back to your days in Chicago play recordings of Reverend Wright unearthing support before political consciousness was bought out by corporate dollars consumer-friendly campaign slogans drawn up in PR-presentable packaging white phosphorus tore at Palestinian flesh as you waited for inauguration schools, mosques, and water wells were shelled as your mouth was blocked transitioning from silent actor to active participant the road to Palestinian rights is not through the White House it never has been no advice will change your mind no appeal will bring back a heartbeat to your conscience you are a mirage Democrats keep crawling back to there is no quick fix no replacement for grassroots mass movement the way forward is clear heeding the call of Palestinian civil society boycott, divestment, and sanctions from Dublin to Cape Town global people of conscience rising up to cut corporate complicity HP, Motorola, SodaStream Aroma, Ahava, and GE U.S. and Israeli companies profiting off of suffering this letter is not a coin in the washing well or a final plea before I resign Palestinians will be free that is an inevitability when you are old and gray and looking back on your presidency many of us will remember where you stood and we will sleep well knowing that even as the hope and change candidate reinforced an indigenous people’s suffering the world knew better fists knocked down walls of resistance wrote the pages of history and the shackles of Israeli oppression remain relics in a museum abhorring the principles you stood for

ALEX KANE
Special Envoy to Palestine and Israel

What a tangled mess I’ve inherited. As special envoy to Palestine and Israel, I have my work cut out. It will be a hard journey, but I’m determined to forge a better way for the people of Israel, Palestine, the Middle East and the United States.

I assume office at a time of great upheaval in the Middle East. The Arab revolutionary wave has swept governments from power in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia, while the Syrian civil war grinds on with catastrophic consequences. There are those who say that this unstable political climate means that we must postpone action on the Israel/Palestine front. But those people are wrong. If anything, the Arab revolutionary wave has exposed Israel’s regional weakness. It would in fact be in Israel’s best interests to address the roots of the Arab-Israeli conflict before it creeps up on them with consequences the state cannot shape.

On the Israel/Palestine front specifically, the challenges remain daunting. I have to deal with a number of vexing developments that have pushed the possibility of a just settlement between Israelis and Palestinians to the farthest reaches of the mind. Nobody thinks peace is possible with a divided Palestinian polity, settlement-boosting right-wing Israeli government and a U.S. government determined to back Israel and shield it from the consequences of its actions.

Where do I come in? Coming from an outsider, my attempts to address internal political developments in Palestine and Israel will likely fail. But my appointment has already shown that possibilities exist for a radically different approach. The time for an even-handed approach. The time has come for the United States to support efforts for a peaceful solution based on international law at the United Nations. Whether this will be a one-state or a two-state solution is up to the international community, and ultimately the Israelis and Palestinians. But the time for U.S. leadership on this issue is now — and we’ll begin with looking at Israel’s criminal behavior.

These policies are no panacea — there is no magic bullet to solve the Israel/Palestine conflict. But the fostering wound of Palestinian statelessness and displacement harms Americans as well as Palestinians and Israelis. The U.S. image in the Middle East will remain dismal as long as we continue to support Israel unconditionally. This affects the region’s instability and Washington’s ability to lead in other areas. And it provides fuel to Islamic extremists who are outraged at Israel’s treatment of Palestinians.

For all those reasons, it is important to shift U.S. policy to a more even-handed approach. The time to end U.S. complicity with Israel’s land-grabbing machine is now.

Alex Kane is an associate editor at the news website Mondo Weiss and the World section editor for AlterNet.
EMPTt THE SHELTERS, FILL THE HOMES

CHERI HONKALA
SECRETARY
DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

My first order of business as the new Housing and Urban Development secretary will be to end homelessness and revamp the HOPE VI grant program. Currently, there are more abandoned properties in this country than there are homeless people, and the solution is obvious: combine the two. Dr. Jill Stein and I ran on a platform of the Green New Deal, which is based on the principle that all Americans have a right to safe, decent and accessible affordable housing. I will work to further this goal.

Current HUD programs are grossly inadequate, and have massive undesirable consequences. A salient example is the failed HOPE VI program. This program, begun in 1993, was designed to revitalize and remedy problems with public housing by departing from the former “housing project” model and moving toward mixed-use development. While a laudable goal, the program has failed and has only made the housing crisis for America’s poor worse. Grants are being used to demolish existing public housing in order to rebuild new “mixed-use” units. There is, however, no requirement that the new construction have a “one-to-one” replacement of the former housing units. Additionally, “mixed use” has been used to develop mixed-income housing, which shrinks the number of units available to the poor and amounts to nothing less than the usurpation of housing from the poor to be given at subsidized rates to the middle class.

The result of this failed program, in cities from Louisville, Ky., and Columbus, Ohio, to the Bay Area in California, is the displacement of U.S. families who can least afford such a change. Families are being uprooted from communities they have lived in for generations and shipped to remote communities without access to transit or employment centers and in many cases left homeless. Rather than solving problems with low-income housing, the HOPE VI program merely hides the poor from the view.

I will immediately institute a moratorium on the disbursement of any further HOPE VI monies. The requirements for obtaining such a grant must be amended. In the first instance, the demolition of housing should be a last resort. Many units have been family homes for generations, and the immoral destruction of these homes must end. In those instances where rebuilding is the best option, the program must require a one-to-one replacement of any demolished unit. Furthermore, these new units must be reserved for low-income families who depend on public housing. Finally, the siting of additional or new units must be in urban centers with access to transit and jobs and not in undesirable and remote areas that burden residents with crippling commutes.

As my first order of business, I will END homelessness by housing our veterans, our seniors and our low-income families. We will empty the shelters and fill the homes! The recommendations above are but the beginning. With the Green New Deal we could make all of this and more a reality. I invite you all to follow Jill Stein and me this year as we work with others to bring the Green New deal to life and make it a reality because the next generation deserves just that!

Cheri Honkala is a nationally known advocate for the poor and homeless, co-founder of the Kensington Welfare Rights Union and co-founder and National Coordinator of the Poor People’s Economic Human Rights Campaign. She was the Green Party’s nominee for vice president in the 2012 U.S. presidential election.

SARAH JAFFE
SECRETARY
DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

The very first thing I would do upon taking office as secretary of labor would be to get some comfortable shoes, find the biggest, best and loudest and most vibrant picket line — strike, lockout, wherever workers are fighting for their rights — and join in. Because ultimately, though good legislation and good executive branch work helps, really, what will revitalize labor is the workers taking the struggle into their own hands.

That said, there’s a few ideas that I’d push for, in addition to deeper, better, stronger and fiercer enforcement of laws holding bosses accountable for how they treat their workforce. It’s so far beyond time to raise the minimum wage that it’s a joke, and a good secretary of labor would lead that fight — I’d say to about $15 an hour and index it to inflation so we’re never stuck in this place again. A domestic workers’ bill of rights on a national scale, modeled after New York’s own, giving domestic workers labor protections. Stronger protections for farmworkers as well — these two types of work were deliberately left out of the National Labor Relations Act because at the time they were jobs done by people of color, and they deserve protections.

I’d pull together the smartest team of experts and advisers and strategists I could find and come up with a labor law reform that would really make an impact — take the good bits of the Employee Free Choice Act, really look at what else we could fix and come up with a package that would stop some of the bleeding from states like Wisconsin and Michigan and Indiana where Republican governors have hacked away union rights.

And finally, it’s time to revamp how we do unemployment insurance, too. Like most of our social safety net, it’s tied to one’s (former) job in a way that leaves too many people vulnerable. With unemployment still high and jobs still too scarce, it’s past time to start talking about an idea from the Nixon administration — a guaranteed minimum income/universal basic income. Nothing gives people power at work like not being terrified of being out of work.

Sarah Jaffe is an independent journalist, a rabblerouser and contributor to Truthout, AlterNet, The Nation, Jacobin and others. Follow her exploits on Twitter: @sarahjaffe.
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*For Manhattan Residents ONLY
Obama’s first-term cabinet gave a few celebrity politicians, like Hillary Clinton, the spotlight; for others, witness protection couldn’t have hidden them more. Here’s a look at some of greatest* hits from the Obama cabinet’s first four years.

**The Old Guard**

**Secretary of State**

**HILLARY CLINTON (2009 – JANUARY 2013)**

Before she was the First Lady, New York Senator and 2008 almost-nominee, Hillary Clinton played another role: during her time as Arkansas First Lady, she served on the board of mega-corporation Wal-Mart for six fruitful years. As Obama’s powerful secretary of state, Clinton called dictators friends (“I really consider [Egyptian] President and Mrs. Mubarak to be friends of my family,” she said in 2009); pushed for war in Libya after initially missing 2010’s Arab Spring (“We didn’t get off to such a great start with Egypt — let’s reverse that with Libya”); and endorsed military coups (initially questioning whether the Honduran military’s 2009 takeover fit the definition of a coup, then enthusiastically welcoming the country back into the international community). Many of Wal-Mart’s clothes are made in Honduras.

**Secretary of Labor**

**HILDA SOLIS (2009 – JANUARY 2013)**

Both Hilda Solis’s nomination and resignation as secretary of labor were met with met with warm and fuzzy press releases from the nation’s largest unions. It’s not surprising, because she basically gets the fight for workers’ rights (even if her boss doesn’t). Remember the huge standoff in Wisconsin over anti-union governor Scott Walker’s attack on public workers in 2011? As janitors and Bremen occupied the state house, the New York Times reported, “When West Wing officials discovered that the Democratic National Committee had mobilized Mr. Obama’s national network to support the protests, they angrily reined in the staff at the party headquarters. Administration officials said they saw such events beyond Washington as distractions from the optimistic ‘win the future’ message Mr. Obama introduced with his State of the Union Address.” Solis’s reputation of fighting for worker’s rights gained nothing from an administration that wouldn’t lift a finger for the pro-worker Employee Free Choice Act while unions, public and private sector, shrink and grow weaker.

**Secretary of Energy**

**STEVEN CHU (2009 — PRESENT)**

Nobel Prize winner Chu has the respect of the scientific community and occasionally calls it as he sees it (saying in 2007, for example, “Coal is my worst nightmare”), but his lackluster leadership has promoted the misnomer “clean coal,” pushed nuclear power (even after Japan’s Fukushima disaster), wasty supported the controversial XL Tar Sands Pipeline, and been simply missing in action on global climate change. If it continues this way, Chu’s place in the history books will be as the one administration official who was smart enough to realize the dangers of global climate change, but did virtually nothing to mitigate the coming storm.

**Secretary of Homeland Security**

**JANET NAPOLITANO (2009 – PRESENT)**

The Obama Administration has detained and deported a record number of undocumented immigrants, expelling around three quarters of a million people in 2011 and 2012 alone.

**Secretary of the Interior**

**KEN SALAZAR (2009 – FEBRUARY 2013)**

As senator, the conservative Democrat voted against measures such as increasing fuel standards, repealing tax breaks for ExxonMobil, and protecting the Florida coast from offshore drilling. As secretary, he upheld the Bush-era policy preventing the regulation of greenhouse gas emissions via the Endangered Species Act and has hewed close to the whims of mining, drilling, and ranching interests. Curiously, the one scandal that has affected him involves his trades of wild horses, sold off to a known horse slaughterer for $10 apiece. When questioned about it late last year, Salazar told a reporter: “If you do that to me again, I’ll punch you out.”

**Secretary of Education**

**ARNE DUNCAN (2009 – PRESENT)**

After eight long years of W. keeping public school teachers on edge, Duncan went out of his way to keep up the heat. Before heading to Washington, he pushed school privatization in Chicago, in 2010, when every teacher in a poorly performing Rhode Island high school was fired, he applauded the move as “courageous”; in 2012, 10 states were finally given waivers to the much-criticized Bush-era “Race to the Top” grants follow a similar painful path: treating education like a competition with winners and losers. Teachers are still on edge and students are still suffering.

**The First Four Years: Obama’s Bloody Footprint**

Since his inauguration in 2009, President Obama has overseen a shadowy and globalized war on terror that relies heavily on elite special operations units and an increasingly militarized Central Intelligence Agency. As of May 2012 U.S. special operations forces were on track to undertake missions in 120 countries around the world, up from approximately 80 the year before.

In addition to ongoing missions in Iraq and Afghanistan, U.S. forces along with the CIA have carried out airstrikes in Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia. A veil of secrecy surrounding the administration’s drone program has made the cost of the strikes difficult to tally but reports by the UK’s bureau of Investigative Journalism indicate President Obama has presided over more than 300 drone strikes in Pakistan alone, with up to 801 civilians killed, including 176 children. In Yemen, U.S. strikes have taken the lives of three U.S. citizens, including 16-year-old Abdulrahman Al-Awlaki. A strike in the remote region of al Ma’ajil in southwestern Yemen in December 2009 resulted in the deaths of 41 people, including at least 21 children.

Under President Obama, the United States played a crucial role in the 2011 military campaign to oust Muammar Gaddafi in Libya, which human rights organizations claim led to the deaths of 72 civilians, including 20 women and 24 children. Much of the administration’s involvement in the Horn of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula has been made possible by the expansion of a secretive drone base in Djibouti, where the unmanned vehicles are said to conduct over a dozen missions in the region each day.

While Obama has claimed that he put an end to the Bush-era tactic of extraordinary rendition, in which terror suspects are captured and shipped to a third country for interrogation, a January report by the Washington Post revealed the administration has continued to embrace the practice. In addition, an investigation in 2011 by The Nation’s Jeremy Scahill uncovered secret prisons in Somalia used by the CIA.

Most recently the Obama administration has offered drone and aerial fueling support to French forces operating in Mali.

—RYAN DEVEREAUX
I t ever there was a part of the Washington bureaucracy that has nowhere to go but up, it would be the Department of Health and Human Services. Last year, HHS was the centerpiece of the Obama administration’s efforts to show that it could be just as big a budget cutter as any Republican White House, not for a moment sparing the most vulnerable. In some ways, it succeeded.

HHS administers a host of programs that aren’t well known to most Americans but that are vital to poor households. Obama’s 2013 austerity budget called for cutting the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, reducing funds for the low-income and uninsured, slashing graduate education funding for children’s doctors and eliminating of the Preventive Health and Health Service Block Grant. The latter is an especially valuable way to shift the focus of U.S. healthcare toward prevention and wellness—something that’s just considered rational in most industrialized countries.

All of these are cuts that Americans will find themselves paying for sooner or later in the form of privation and worse health care for the poorest. In addition, we’ll be dealing with the consequences of continuing woeful undertinking of vital services like foster care and other child care, HIV/AIDS prevention programs and home-based care for seniors.

So where do I go from here, as secretary of HHS? First, a word of definition. Outside of Homeland Security, HHS is the biggest bureaucracy that has nowhere to go but down. If ever there was a part of the Washington establishment that needed to do more and leave this fundamental issue alone, my name is Eric Laursen, a freelance journalist based in western Massachusetts. He’s the author of The People’s Pension: The Struggle to Defend Social Security Since 1935.

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BUILDING A MOVEMENT
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DIRECTOR  
DRUG ENFORCEMENT ADMINISTRATION

I accept the assignment to become head of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). I propose the following new mission for the agency: 

DEA = Dare to Explore Alternatives

I think it’s fair to say our drug enforcement policies fit the definition of insanity: doing the same thing over and over expecting a different result.

My goal as DEA administrator is to break the cycle of agency dependency on supply-side approaches emphasizing interdiction, arrest, conviction and incarceration as the principal way to win the “war on drugs.” I recommend the DEA explore alternative drug policies and practices in the following three areas:

REFORM MARIJUANA POLICY

A. Reschedule Marijuana and Allow State Experimentation

It’s time the DEA acknowledged the shift in public opinion regarding the appropriate-ness of punishing people for possessing and using marijuana — 16 states and the District of Columbia have approved access to marijuan-a for medical use. Last November vot-ers in Washington and Colorado approved authorizing their states to tax and regulate marijuana cultivation and distribution to adults for recreational use. Recent polls have affirmed this is not just a regional shift — nationally, more than 50 percent of Americans 40 years and younger believe marijuana should be legally regulated for adult use, more than two thirds of Ameri-cans of all ages support access to medical marihuana. Yet federal policy still considers marijuana a dangerous drug, deserving of Schedule 1 status, meaning it has no legiti-mate use — more dangerous than cocaine, which is classified Schedule 2. The policy defies logic and experience, which is why one-third of states have enacted laws directly in defiance. What should a transformational administration do? Dare to explore alternatives.

I recommend the DEA support the request by the governors of Washington, Rhode Is-land and Vermont that the federal govern-ment reschedule marijuana consistent with available science and medical research.

President Obama recently affirmed that pursuing marijuana users is not a priority of federal law enforcement, as he correctly noted, “we have bigger fish to fry.” It makes sense for the DEA and Justice Department to allow officials to develop and implement ef-fective regulatory schemes in states that have approved access to marijuana. A recent eco-nomic study projects the development of a le-gal supply of domestically grown cannabis in the United States has the potential to dramat-ically reduce the profits derived by Mexican drug cartels — for instance, the Sinaloa cartel could lose about $1 billion/year if it had to compete with marijuana grown in Washing-ton or Colorado. Few U.S. drug policies have significantly affected the profitability of the illicit drug trade; the DEA should encourage states to be “laboratories for experimenta-tion” by exploring alternative drug policies that can undermine the power and profits of drug trafficking organizations is something the DEA should endorse.

B. Reduce Marijuana Arrests

Nationally, arrests for marijuana offenses account for nearly half of all drug arrests by state and local law enforcement, often made possible by federal funding. African-American and Latino youth are disproportion-ately targeted for drug law enforcement, and marijuana arrests are no exception. This racially biased law enforcement under-mines the Obama administration’s goal of increasing school retention rates and improving educational outcomes, par-ticularly for black and Latino youth. Under my direction, the DEA will make receipt of federal funding for local law enforcement contingent on demonstrating elimination of racial, gender and ethnic and age disparities in drug law enforcement as well as reducing arrests for marijuana offenses.

REDUCE PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE

While the DEA has focused primarily on fighting illicit drug use, prescription drug abuse has reached epidemic proportions. In recent years more people have died from prescription drug overdoses than all the il-llicit drugs combined. For millions of Ameri-cans with inadequate or no health insur-ance, pharmaceuticals are marketed as a relatively cheap way to deal with various health challenges. Painkillers and medica-tions that treat attention deficit disorders have become common drugs of abuse. So far the DEA has relied on strategies designed to reduce diversion, but an unintended conse-quence of this approach has been shortages of medication for legitimate patients with immediate needs.

The DEA will initiate a public education campaign about the dangers of prescription drug abuse — Pills Can Kill. The campaign will target populations with heightened vul-nerability to prescription drug abuse including students, shift workers, military veterans and people with mental health disorders. I recommend the DEA collect data from states with medical marijuana programs to assess the efficacy of cannabis for pain man-agement. Evidence suggests marijuana may provide a viable alternative to oxycodeone and other pharmaceutical opioids for man-aging acute and/or chronic pain.

MITIGATE THE INTERNATIONAL IMPACT OF U.S. DRUG LAW ENFORCEMENT

Nowhere have the consequences of drug war militarization been felt more acutely than in Mexico. Over the past six years, more than 60,000 men, women and children have lost their lives in Mexico’s bloody drug war as carts battle the government and each other for access to the lucrative U.S. drug market. Often they’re killing each other with guns that come from the United States, purchased with money laundered by U.S. banks.

Our neighbors to the south have become disillusioned with the war on drugs. Recent-ly leaders from Mexico, Honduras, Belize, Costa Rica and Guatemala have called for reassessing the global drug prohibition re-gime that relies on punishment and explor-ing alternative approaches that will reduce the violence, sickness and death associated with the drug war. The DEA will endorse the call by Latin American leaders for a re-gional meeting of the Organization of Amer-i-can States to discuss drug policies followed by a U.N. General Assembly Special Session on drug prohibition no later than 2015. To-gether we will Dare to Explore Alternatives to punitive drug prohibition.

Deborah Peterson Small is the executive director of Break the Chains, a public policy re-search and advocacy organization committed to addressing the disproportionate impact of punitive drug policies on poor communities of color.
1. Re-instate grants to artists. 501(c)(3) status will no longer be a requirement to access public funds for creating culture. The arts are one of the last (and quickly dwindling) fringes of rote professionalization, and funding will support continued experimentation in the contours of creative life.

2. Definitively lift all content restrictions on funding, whether explicit or tacit. Content restrictions run counter to the First Amendment. Artists cannot create a diverse dialogue that enriches our culture under conditions of censorship. Art is not meant to advance a singular point of view, particularly not one that is heterosexist, racist, and misogynistic, such as the one that led to the introduction of the content restrictions idea and near dissolution of the NEA 20 years ago.

3. Up the percent of the one percent. In the age of record prices in a rarefied but over-exposed corner of the art market, the NEA recommends a tax of 50 percent on all art sales of $50,000 or greater. This revenue is to be earmarked to fund co-operatively run exhibitions, performances, and public art projects, as well as healthcare for cultural workers.

SUNITA PRASAD
Director
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