



## Gray Panthers Roar into San Francisco



Texas G/P  
Gary Dugger

This year, we celebrated *40 years of achievement!* To commemorate this occasion, Gray Panthers around the country took part in a year of heightened activism and special events. We raised our voices and growled and prowled for Gray Panthers issues and progressive causes. Considering the political and social climate of the past year, there was plenty to growl about.

On April 30th, Gray Panthers culminated our *40th Anniversary* year with a fundraiser event in San Francisco to help to support our important work.

Gray Panthers Social Justice Awards were presented four special honorees including Carroll L. Estes, Ph.D., Charlotte Flynn, Senator Mark Leno, and Susan Murany. The event was a success and the National Gray Panthers and Boards were excited to meet and greet with several of the local Gray Panthers Networks.

Gray Panthers trip to San Francisco was filled with action of course! Gray Panthers took part in The National Day of Online Advocacy during our Social Media Outreach workshop facilitated by Dr. Brooke Hollister, National Board Vice-Chair. Gray Panthers also participated in the May Day Parade where we marched in solidarity for immigrant rights.



Texas G/P Gary Dugger & Charlotte Flynn

We are extremely proud of all we have accomplished during our *40th Anniversary* year. But we know that our work is not done and we have reaffirmed our commitment to working for social and economic justice and peace in the future. The same passionate and action-driven flame that Maggie Kuhn sparked over 40 years ago continue to fuel our fire for social and economic justice and peace today.

***Panthers on the Prowl!***



Recipients of G/P Social Justice Award

Speak your mind  
even if your voice  
shakes.  
Well aimed slingshots  
can topple giants.  
-- maggie kuhn,  
founder

### *You're Invited*

Texas Gray Panthers  
of Austin

### **Pool Side Party!**

*Ya'll come!*

**Sunday, June 26**

**3:00 to 6:00 p.m.**

At the beautiful Hill  
Country Estate of

**Gary & Lisa Dugger**  
8507 Lewis Mountain Dr  
Austin 78737

This is a wonderful  
opportunity to get together  
with friends, discuss budget  
cuts, corruption in local,  
state, federal government  
and what we can do about it,  
**and** the outcome of recent  
city elections!

*If Possible...*  
Please RSVP 512-225-4789  
Bring you swimsuit & towel!

Texas Gray Panthers , Convener: Gary Dugger  
3710 Cedar St, Box 15, Austin, TX 78705  
Texas Gray Panthers' Newsletter Editor, Co-Convener: Sharron Aisenman

512-225-4789; Ofc: 512-458-3738 [www.graypanthersaustin.org](http://www.graypanthersaustin.org)  
National Gray Panthers [www.graypanthers.org](http://www.graypanthers.org)  
[sharronaisenman@yahoo.com](mailto:sharronaisenman@yahoo.com)

## Sen. Alan Simpson Gives Finger to AARP, SAYS Social Security is 'not a retirement program'

By Joan McCarter for Daily Kos, May 10, 2011

"Alan Simpson and his senior-citizen-hating ways are back in the news. It will come as a shock to most Social Security recipients to find out that Social Security isn't a retirement program. And that a former Senator who was chosen by the President to lead an important government commission has so much contempt for government programs. WASHINGTON—Alan Simpson's cold relationship with AARP is no secret, but the former Republican Senator from Wyoming took it to a new level Friday. At an event hosted by the Investment Company Institute, Simpson delighted the finance industry audience members by aiming a rude gesture at the leading lobby for senior citizens....Simpson's forceful gesture came after an extended diatribe against Social Security, which he said is a "Ponzi" scheme, "not a retirement program."



Senator Alan Simpson

Simpson argued that Social Security was originally intended more as a welfare program. "It was never intended as a retirement program. It was set up in '37 and '38 to take care of people who were in distress—ditch diggers, wage earners—it was to give them 43% of the replacement rate of their wages. The [life expectancy] was 63. That's why they set retirement age at 65" for Social Security, he said. Which of course, is not true...HuffPost suggested to Simpson during a telephone interview that his claim about live expectancy was misleading because his data include people who died in childhood of diseases that are now largely preventable. Incorporating such early deaths skews the average life expectancy number downward, making it appear as if people live dramatically longer today than they did half a century ago. According to the Social Security Administration's actuaries, women who lived to 65 in 1940 had a life expectancy of 79.7 years and men were expected to live 77.7 years. "If that is the case—and I don't think it is—then that means they put in peanuts," said Simpson.

Simpson speculated that the data presented to him by HuffPost had been furnished by "the Catfood Commission people"—a reference to progressive critics of the deficit commission who gave president's panel that label.

Of course, this isn't the first time Alan Simpson has been confronted with *real* Social Security statistics and facts. There's one extremely memorable occasion in which Simpson unleashed an obscene tirade at Alex Lawson, with Social Security Works in response to Lawson's informed questions about the program. Again, using actual information from the Social Security Administration, Simpson attacked, calling Lawson's facts "sophistry of babbling."

*Simpson is a fraud and an ideologue, unable to separate whatever personal and long-standing resentment he has of the AARP (and apparently all senior citizens) from the truth about the program. When will this guy stop being the crazy uncle that everybody indulges and just thinks of as eccentric, and be recognized for the venomous, classless, charlatan that he is?"*

## Simpson's Social Security Outburst May Upend Fiscal Commission

By Tamara Lytle from AARP Bulletin, September 2, 2010 "Getting a size 15 shoe out of his mouth is proving difficult for Alan Simpson, the head (co-chair with Erskin Bowles) of President Obama's deficit commission. Advocates for older people and Social Security benefits continue to call for Simpson's ouster because of derogatory remarks about the retirement program. 'It absolutely craters the credibility of the commission' said NOW President Terry O'Neill, who calls for his immediate firing. 'And it shoots the credibility of Barack Obama.'

Simpson, a Republican senator from 1979 to 1997, made his disparaging remarks in a e-mail to National Older Women's League head Ashley Carson, a strong supporter of Social Security benefits. '...yes, I've made some plenty smart cracks about people on Social Security who milk it to the last degree. You know 'em too. It's the same with any system in America. We've reached a point now where it's like a milk cow with 310 million tits!' Then he added, 'Call when you get honest work!'

The e-mail from the outspoken Simpson has provoked petitions, letters and other calls for his dismissal from the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform. President Obama appointed him co-chairman of the panel, which is expected to make recommendations to Congress in December about how to tackle the looming deficit crisis...but the White House and the fiscal commission both have said Simpson will stay on the job. White House press secretary Robert Gibbs said they regret that he sent the e-mail. 'We don't condone those comments. But senator Simpson has and will continue to serve on the commission.'...NOW plans to get its point across to the White House by delivering loads of baby bottle nipples along with a petition asking that he (Simpson) be removed as commission chairman. They call it their 'Tits for an Ass' campaign. [http://www.aarp.org/work/social-security/info-09-2010/simpsons\\_social\\_security...](http://www.aarp.org/work/social-security/info-09-2010/simpsons_social_security...)

## National Gray Panthers Go On Record to Oppose Simpson - Call for Removal May 11, 2011

Dear Mr. President,

- > As an organization that cares deeply about the rights and well-being of older people and others, Sen. Alan Simpson's forceful gesture and diatribe against Social Security, which he said is a "Ponzi" scheme, "not a retirement program," our members are demanding that he be removed from a decision-making role on Social Security.
- > Social Security pays for itself and should not be a part of the budget discussion. Social Security belongs to the workers of this country and needs only minor adjustments, not cuts to keep it solvent. Lifting the cap on taxable income would be a start.
- > Sen. Simpson is an embarrassment to your Administration and to seniors and others who depend on the program for their retirement.

Respectfully yours, Judy Lear, Chair, Susan Murany, Executive Director  
National Gray Panthers

<http://www.graypanthers.org>

**Agree With Gray Panthers? - Call the White House Comment Line 202-456-111 Demand Simpson's Removal!**



## Why Do We Assume Obama's Actually Trying to Enact a Progressive Agenda?

By Glenn Greenwald for Salon.com, April 17, 2011

"What evidence is there that Obama truly wants progresssive outcomes? In December, President Obama signed legislation to extend hundreds of billions of dollars in Bush tax cuts, benefiting the wealthiest Americans. Last week, Obama agreed to billion of dollars in cuts that will impose the greatest burden on the poorest Americans. And now, virtually everyone in Washington believes, the President is about to embark on a path that will ultimately lead to some type of reductions in Social Security, Medicare and/or Medicaid benefits under the banner of 'reform.' Tax cuts for the rich-budget cuts for the poor—'reform' of the Democratic Party's signature safety net programs—a continuation of Bush/Cheney Terrorism policies and a new Middle East war launched without Congressional approval. That's quite a legacy combination for a Democratic President.



All of that has led to a spate of negotiation advice from the liberal punditocracy advising the President how he can better defend progressive policy aims—as though the Obama White House deeply wishes for different results but just can't figure out how to achieve them. Jon Chait, Josh Marshall and Matt Yglesias all insist that the President is 'losing' on these battles because of bad negotiating strategy, and will continue to lose unless it improves. Ezra Klein says 'it makes absolutely no sense' that Democrats didn't just raise the debt ceiling in December, when they had the majority and could have done it with no budget cuts. Once it became clear that the White House was not following their recommended action of demanding a 'clean' vote on raising the debt ceiling—thus ensuring there will be another, probably larger round of budget cuts—Yglesias lamented that the White House had 'flunked bargaining 101.' Their assumption is that Obama loathes these outcomes but is the victim of his own weak negotiating strategy.

I don't understand that assumption at all. Does anyone believe that Obama and his army of veteran Washington advisers are incapable of discovering these tactics on their own or devising better strategies for trying to avoid these outcomes if that's what they really wanted to do? What evidence is there that Obama has some inner, intense desire for more progressive outcomes? These are the results they're getting because these are the results they want—for reasons that make perfectly rational political sense.

Conventional D.C. wisdom—that which Obama vowed to subvert but has done as much as any President to bolster—has held for decades that Democratic Presidents succeed politically by being as 'centrist' or even as conservative as possible. That attracts independents, diffuses GOP enthusiasm, casts the President as a triangulating conciliator, and generates raves from the DC press corps—all while keeping more than enough Democrats and progressives in line through a combination of anti-GOP fear mongering and partisan loyalty.

Isn't that exactly the winning combination that will maximize the President's re-election chances? Just consider the polling data on last weeks budget cuts, which most liberal commentators scorned. Americans support the 'compromise' by a margin of 58-38%; that support includes a majority of independents, substantial GOP factions, and 2/3 of Democrats. Why would Democrats overwhelmingly support domestic budget cuts that burden the poor? Because, as Yglesias correctly observed, **just about anything Barack Obama does will be met with approval by most Democrats.** In other words, once Obama lends his support to a policy—no matter how much of a departure it is from ostensible Democratic beliefs—then most self-identified Democrats will support it **because Obama supports it**, because it then becomes the 'Democratic policy,' by definition. Adopting 'centrist' or even right-wing policies will always produce the same combination—approval of independents, dilution of GOP anger, media raves, and continued Democratic voter loyalty—that is ideal for the President's re-election prospects.

That tactic in the context of economic policy has the added benefit of keeping corporate and banking money on Obama's side (where it overwhelmingly was in 2008), or at least preventing a massive influx to GOP coffers. And just look at the team of economic advisers surrounding Obama from the start does anyone think that Bill Daley, Tim Geithner and his army of Rubin acolytes and former Goldman Sachs executives are sitting around in rooms desperately trying to prevent budget cuts and entitlements 'reforms'?

Why would Obama possibly want to do anything different? Why would he possibly want a major political war over the debt ceiling where he looks like a divisive figure and looks to be opposing budget cuts? Why would he possibly want to draw a line in the sand defending Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security from any 'reforms'? There would be only two reasons to do any of that: (1) fear that he would lose too much of his base if he compromised with the GOP in these areas, or (2) a genuine conviction that such compromises are morally or economically intolerable. Since he so plainly lacks both—a fear of losing the base or genuine convictions about this or anything else—there's simply nothing to drive him to fight for those outcomes.

Like most first-term Presidents after two years, Obama is preoccupied with his re-election, and perceives—not unreasonably—that that goal is best accomplished by adopting GOP policies. The only factor that could subvert that political calculation—fear that he could go too far and cause Democratic voters not to support him—is a fear that he simply does not have probably for good reason. In fact, not only does Obama not fear alienating progressive supporters, the White House seems to view that alienation as a positive, as it only serves to bolster Obama's above-it-all, centrist credentials. Here's what CNN White House Correspondent Ed Henry and Gloria Borger said last night about the upcoming fight over entitlements and the debt ceiling.

**Henry:** I was talking to a senior Democrat who advises the White House, outside the White House today who was saying look, every time this president sits down with Speaker Boehner, to Gloria's point about negotiating skills, the president seems to give up another 5 billion dollars, 10 billion dollars, 20 billion dollars. It's like the spending cuts keep going up. If you think about where the congressional Democrats started a couple of months ago they were talking about no spending cuts on the table. It keeps going on. But this president has a much different reality that congressional Democrats.

**Borger** (sagely) Right.

**Henry:** He's going for re-election, him going to the middle and having liberal Democrats mad at him is not a bad thing.

**Borger:** Exactly.

That's why I experience such cognitive dissonance when I read all of these laments from liberal pundits that Obama isn't pursuing the right negotiating tactics, that he's not being as shrewd as he should be. He's pursuing exactly the right negotiating tactics and is being extremely shrewd—he just doesn't want the same results that these liberal pundits want and which they like to imagine the President wants, too. He's not trying to prevent budget cuts or entitlement reforms; he wants exactly those things because of how politically beneficial they are to him—to say nothing of whether he agrees with them on the merits."

*Continued page 4 Why assume*

**Continued from p3 Why Assume**

"When I first began blogging five years ago I used to write posts like that all the time. I'd lament that Democrats weren't more effectively opposing Bush/Cheney National Security State policies or defending civil liberties. I'd attribute those failures to poor strategizing or a lack of political courage and write post after post urging them to adopt better tactics to enable better outcomes or be more politically 'strong.' But then I realized that they weren't poor tacticians getting stuck with results they hated. They simply weren't interested in generating the same outcomes as the ones I wanted.

It wasn't that they eagerly wished to defeat these Bush policies but just couldn't figure out how to do it. The opposite was true they were content to acquiesce to those policies. If not outright supportive of them, because they perceived no political advantage in doing anything else. Many of them supported those policies on the merits while many others were perfectly content with their continuation. So I stopped trying to give them tactical advice on how to achieve outcome they didn't really want to achieve, and stopped attributing their failures to oppose these policies to bad strategizing or political cowardice. Instead, I simply accepted that these were the outcomes they most wanted, that Democratic Party officials on the whole—obviously with some exceptions—weren't working toward the outcomes I had originally assumed (and which they often claimed). Once you accept that reality, events in Washington make far more sense.

That Obama's agenda includes an affirmative desire for serious budget cuts and entitlement 'reforms' has been glaringly obvious from the start; it's not some unintended, recent by-product of Tea Party ascendancy. Since before Obama was even inaugurated. Digby has been repeatedly warning of this support for a so-called 'Grand Bargain' that would include cuts to Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid. And Jane Hamsher and Ezra Klein had a fairly acrimonious exchange very early on in the Obama presidency over the former's observation that Obama officials were expressly advocating cuts in Social Security while Klein insisted that this would never happen (yesterday, Klein reported that Obama would be supportive of Bowles-Simpson, which proposes deep cuts to Social Security, and boasted of his anticipation weeks ago that this would happen). Before Obama's inauguration, I wrote that the most baffling thing to me about the enthusiasm of his hardest-core supporters was the belief that he was pioneering a 'new form of politics' when, it seemed obvious, it was just a re-branded re-treat of Clintonian triangulation and the same 'centrist', scorn-the-base playbook Democratic politicians had used for decades.

What amazes me most is the brazen claims of presidential impotence necessary to excuse all of this. Atrios has written for weeks about the 'can't do' spirit that has overtaken the country generally, but that mindset pervades how the President's supporters depict both him and the powers of his office; no bad outcomes are ever his fault because he's just powerless in the face of circumstance. That claim is being made now by pointing to GOP Congress, but the same claim was made when there was a Democratic Congress as well; recall the disagreements I had with his most loyal supporters in 2009 and 2010 over their claims that he was basically powerless even to influence his own party's policy-making in Congress.

Such excuse-making stands in very sharp contrast to what we heard in 2008 and what we will hear again in 2012: that the only thing that matters is that Obama win the Presidency because of how powerful and influential an office it is, how disaster will befall us all if this vast power falls into Republican hands. It also contradicts the central promise of the Obama candidacy: that he would change, rather than bolster, the standard power dynamic in Washington. And it is especially inconsistent with Obama's claimed desire to be a 'transformational' President in much the way that Ronald Reagan was (but, Obama said to such controversy, Bill Clinton was not). Gaudy claims of Fundamental Change and Transformation and **Yes, We Can!** Have given way to an endless parade of excuse-making that he's powerless, weak and there's nothing he can do.

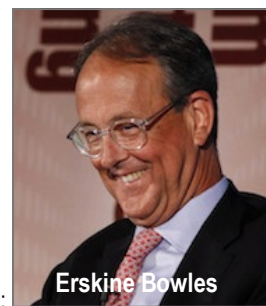
When has Obama ever done any of that? When does he offer stirring, impassioned defenses of the Democrats' vision on anything, or attempt to transform (rather than dutifully follow) how Americans think about anything? It's not that he lacks the ability to do that. Americans responded to him as an inspirational figure and his skills of oratory are as effective as any politician in our lifetime. It's that he evinces no interest in it. He doesn't try because those aren't his goals. It's not that he or the office of the Presidency are powerless to engender other outcomes, it's that he doesn't use the power he has to achieve them because, quite obviously, achieving them is not his priority or even desire.

Whether in economic policy, national security, civil liberties, or the permanent consortium of corporate power that turn Washington, Obama, above all else, is content to be (one could even say eager to be) guardian of the status quo. And the forces of the status quo want tax cuts for the rich, serious cuts in government spending that don't benefit them (social programs and progressive regulatory schemes), and entitlement 'reform'—so that's what Obama will do. He won't advocate, and will actually oppose, steps as extreme as the ones Paul Ryan is proposing; that's how he will retain his 'centrist' political identity and keep the fear levels high among his voting base. He'll pay lip service to some Democratic economic dogma and defend some financially inconsequential culture war positions: that's how he will signal to the base that he's still on their side. But the direction will be the same as the GOP desires, and, most importantly, how the most powerful economic factions demand: not because he can't figure out how to change that dynamic, but because that's what benefits him and thus what he wants.

Ironically, Obama is turning out to be 'transformational' in this own way—by taking what was once the defining GOP approach to numerous policy areas and converting them into Democratic ones, and thus ensconcing them in the invulnerable protective shield of 'bipartisan consensus.' As Digby put it, 'Regan was a hard-core ideologue who didn't just tweak some processes but radically changed the prevailing conventional wisdom. Unfortunately, Obama is actually extending the Reagan consensus, even as he pursues his own agenda of creating a Grand Bargain that will bring peace among the dueling parties (a dubious goal in itself.)' That has been one of the most consequential outcomes of the first two years of his presidency in terms of Terrorism and civil liberties, and is now being consecrated in the realm of economic policy as well."

Glen Greenwald is a Constitutional law attorney and chief blogger at Unclaimed Territory.

His book, **How Would a Patriot Act Defending American Values from a President Run Amok** will be released by Working Assets Publishing is available in book stores.



Erskine Bowles

## FSU Accepts Funds From Charles Koch In Return For Control Over Its Academic Freedom

### Think Progress By Travis Waldron on May 10th, 2011

Charles Koch, the billionaire libertarian who has funded front-groups and lobbying efforts to expand his anti-tax, anti-regulatory agenda under the guise of 'free enterprise,' has now widened his reach into another key public policy area: academics. The Charles G. Koch Charitable Foundation entered into an agreement with Florida State University in 2008 in which the foundation would provide millions of dollars in fund for the school's economics department.

The funds were marked to add multiple faculty positions in the economics department. But the money came with multiple strings attached, including a demand that Koch have the ability to directly approve who ultimately filled the positions. As the St. Petersburg Times reports, the agreement is now raising questions across the board about academic freedom and integrity at public colleges and universities:

Under the agreement with the Charles G. Koch Charitable Foundation, however, faculty only retain the illusion of control. The contract specifies that **an advisory committee appointed by Koch decides which candidates should be considered. The foundation can also withdraw its funding if it's not happy with the faculty's choice or if the hires don't meet 'objectives' set by Koch during annual evaluations.**

Koch wasted little time in asserting his influence. In 2009, he denied 60% of the faculty's suggestions to fill the positions in the new programs, called the Study of Political Economy and Free Enterprise (SPEFE) and Excellence in Economics Education (EEE). The hires that were made were agreed upon by Koch and the department's faculty. But according to a memorandum about the agreement, obtained by the Tallahassee Democrat, the ability to pick and chose faculty members was hardly the only string attached. In addition, Koch wanted the ability to review work done by the economics faculty and much more:

**-The three senior professors must come in with tenure, and FSU must continue to fund them for at least four years past the project period.**

**-The Advisory Board of SPSFC and EEE is allowed to review all publicly**



**provided material submitted by applicants for the Professorship positions.**

**-The Advisory Board will determine which candidates qualify to receive funding.**

**-No funding for a professorship position or any other affiliated program or position will be released without the review and approval of the Advisory Board.**

**-An under graduate program will be devised and funded for \$30,000 per year for three years.**

**-Other strings spell out the right of the [Charles G. Koch] Foundation to annually review the work of funded professors, publications, publicity, etc, and pick up their marbles and go home if not satisfied.**

David Rasmussen, the dean of FSC of Social Sciences and Public Policy, has asserted that academic integrity and 'philanthropy' can coexist, arguing that there is no problem with the school's agreement with Koch. But many universities have strict policies regarding donors' influence over how donations are used, and Yale University once returned a \$20 million donation because a donor wanted to veto power over hires.

The agreement with FSU is hardly Koch's first foray into higher education. The Koch brothers have provided funding to numerous colleges and universities, including George Mason University, to which the Kochs have donated millions of dollars for an economics program that has played an extensive role in anti-regulatory policy development.

Because selling out its academic freedom to Koch apparently wasn't enough, FSU also entered into an agreement with BB&T, which provided funding for a course on ethics and economics and required that Ayn Rand's, *Atlas Shrugged*, be a part of the course curriculum. "If somebody is willing to help support your student and faculty by giving you money, but we'd like you to read this book, doesn't strike me as a big sin."

In the world where billionaires and corporations take over education, the only big sin is apparently fighting back. **Can Texas be far behind?**  
<http://thinkprogress.org/2011/05/10/koch-florida-state/>

## Three Questions for Randi Shade and Kathie Tovo

Clint Smith, Gray Panthers National Board Member/ Texas, has submitted three questions to **Randi Shade** and **Kathie Tovo**, candidates for Austin City Council, Place 3, in June 18 run-off election, based on the documented data and information posted and available on [www.austinaccountabilityproject.com](http://www.austinaccountabilityproject.com). Responses are for **PUBLIC INFORMATION**.

#1. On the documented articles reprinted from the newspaper **TODD**, "Phantom funds" both parts 1 & 2, June and August of 2010, WHAT IS YOUR RESPONSE TO "Where's the Money: that's STILL a Question?" AND what is your view on the Austin American Statesman article on Margaret Shaw?

#2. Considering the numbers of specific **EXAMPLES OF INDIVIDUAL HOMEOWNERS'** and Citizen's reporting adverse experiences and treatment at the hands of Public Officials, and their 'representatives,' WHAT ACTIONS AND/OR MEASURES DO YOU PROPOSE as a REMEDY? These reports may represent a pattern of 'deliberate practices' (i.e. possibly corrupt activities) as well as being a strong basis for allegations of Criminal Conduct. WHAT ACTION(s) or measures do YOU propose as a REMEDY? Should (Shouldn't) misuse of FEDERAL FUNDS be INVESTIGATED as Violation(s) of Federal Law?

#3. Has the information included, in whole or in part in [www.austinaccountabilityproject.com](http://www.austinaccountabilityproject.com) EVER been BROUGHT TO YOUR ATTENTION PRIOR TO THIS DATE. If so, what were YOUR ACTION(s)?

**Reply is requested by June 1, 2011, PUBLICALLY – AND to [Editors@Statesman.com](mailto:Editors@Statesman.com); [Ken@theaustinbulldog.com](mailto:Ken@theaustinbulldog.com); [Mking@chronicle.com](mailto:Mking@chronicle.com) et al. Board, Gray Panthers of Austin, 512-458/3738 [www.graypanthersaustin.org](http://www.graypanthersaustin.org).**

Responses will be immediately posted on line at [www.graypanthers.org](http://www.graypanthers.org).

Leslie Aisenman, Director, Public Official Accountability Project  
Gary Dugger, Convener, Gray Panthers Network/Texas

Sharron Aisenman, Co-Convener, Gray Panther Network/ Texas  
Clint Smith, Member Gray Panthers National Board/Texas

\*\*Ref [www.graypanthers.org](http://www.graypanthers.org) Austin/CenTx 2010/11 Screen Two Actions. -



## The (Not So) Clandestine War on The Worker Classes (Including The Middle and Laboring Class) Part 1

Whether or not we are ready, a clandestine guerilla War has burst into full view in every part of our political life. Starting as far back as the Reagan Administration the direction of every National Administration has been remarkably consistent. 1. Break the power of any organized opposition (Reagan started with the air traffic controllers who had been fools enough to support him). 2. Restructure the American Economy and the Tax Rates to shift as much wealth as possible from the workers and Middle Classes to the Top strata of Economic Society.

Armed with his Corporatist Kitchen Cabinet of plutocrats and right-wing funders, Reagan's minions began the job of dismantling all the successful programs of the prior ½ Century. They began an inspired and racist PR program attacking the Welfare Queens who drove to the welfare office in Caddys and the young bucks buying steak with their food stamps. They painted organized labor as promoting the decline of the American Work Ethic, excoriating Unions as the purveyors of "featherbedding" and destroyers of American competitiveness. It didn't have to be true. In the recessionary climate it created the necessary bogeymen to blame for....anything! The businessman was extolled as the creator of wealth and the small businessman as the fundamental creator of jobs. Along with the militarily bloated Reagan Budget everything was designed to kill any possible expansion of the social safety net and any growth in the evolution of social programs while blaming the victims. This was all clearly stated by Reagan's OMB Director, David Stockman.

Taking over a budget deficit of \$79.0 billion from President Carter the national debt hit a total of \$1 trillion in October of 1981, *the result of 205 years as a nation*. Then, trumpeting a policy of small government and governmental austerity, David and Ronald smilingly saw to the growth of our national debt to then unimaginable heights. When Stockman resigned 4 1/2 years into the Reagan administration, the federal debt had nearly doubled to \$1.8 trillion. By the end of fiscal year 1988 the national debt topped \$2.6 trillion, two and ½ times the level they inherited and the debt would go still higher. Bush I carried the program forward, but when he dared to raise taxes he was excoriated, abused, and called a liar and a traitor.

This was not just due to the vastly increased spending but to a revised tax code that gave preference to the wealthiest among us. With all of this, and the radical economic policies it projected, it was nothing compared with what was coming under Bush II. War had been declared and the rampaging fiscal armies of the right were winning blow by blow, battle by battle. The Citadel of the Welfare State was scaled and the Social Compact, sharing our prosperity, broken in many pieces, left waiting to be deserted by the corporate centrists of the Democratic Leadership Council in the person of President William Clinton. Almost as soon as he took office, Clinton's announced an economic plan focused on deficit reduction rather than the middle-class tax cut that had been a highlight of his campaign agenda. Taking the right-wings mantra to heart he brought us DLC Welfare Reform, targeting the vulnerable to pay for his deficit reductions. His advisor's, including Robert Rubin with ties to Goldman Sachs, a top tier Wall Street Banking House, pressured Clinton to raise taxes on the theory it would reduce interest rates by reducing the deficit and prepared the way for banking deregulation.

It was indeed a new Democratic Leadership. During his Presidency we saw the loss of Democratic Control of Congress for the first time in forty years. We saw Newt Gingrich and his Contract On America (I'm sorry. I can never seem to type that right). He joined the political right wing again by fast-tracking the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) ratified by 132 Republicans and 102 Democrats while 156 Democrats, 43 Republicans and 1 Independent voted no. The best Democratic friend the reactionaries ever had was thanked by being the focus of their efforts to smear and remove him from office. Clinton topped off his performance in 1999 by signing the bank deregulation bill that repealed Glass-Steagall, a Depression Era reform that had controlled the excesses of our banks, unleashing an unprecedented assault on the people by corporate greed, outright theft, and the near destruction of the American Economy.

The End of Part One. Next Month, part 2: BUSH II AND OBAMA

*By Leslie Aisenman*

**STOP FRACKING NOW! TELL CONGRESS - PASS THE FRAC ACT!**<http://stopfrackingnow.com/faq>**What is fracking?**

Horizontal hydraulic fracturing — is a drilling method used by oil companies to extract gas from shale as deep as 8,000 feet below the surface. Horizontal fracking mixes hundreds of chemicals with millions of gallons of water and blasts it into the ground under high pressure to break up shale and rock and release gas.

**How is it dangerous?**

Not only does the process use millions of gallons of water which are then contaminated by chemicals and radioactive material, the fracks often leak chemicals and gas into the ground water, contaminating wells and rivers that supply drinking water for millions of people. The extent of the harm caused by fracking remains unknown, but many residents exposed to the water and air contaminated by fracking toxins have reported health concerns ranging from nausea and fainting spells to respiratory problems and even cancer.

**Where does it take place?**

Fracking is happening in 28 states. Any land containing shale is prime fracking territory. The effects of fracking can be felt in a wide radius around each and every drill site.

**What is the legal status of fracking?**

Because Dick Cheney negotiated Halliburton loophole in 2005, fracking is currently unregulated by the EPA. Oil companies don't have to disclose the chemicals used in the process. Even though it is widely documented that fracking poses extreme health risks particularly in our drinking water, the Halliburton loophole exempts fracking from the Clean Water Act.

**Are there safer alternatives to fracking? What are they?**

Truly clean energy technology — such as solar and wind power — has the potential to create millions of American jobs and break our dependence on oil and other fossil fuels like the natural gas extracted by fracking.

**What's being done to stop it?**

The FRAC Act (Fracturing Responsibility and Awareness to Chemical Act) is a House bill intended to repeal the Halliburton Loophole and to require the natural gas industry to disclose the chemicals they use.

Additionally, there are moratoriums on fracking proposed in individual states—for example the Delaware River Basin Commission is currently considering extending a moratorium on fracking in Pennsylvania and New York which affects the drinking water of over 15 million people.

**How can I help? Call your elected officials and demand they vote for the FRAC Act!**

***Letter to Editors Austin American Statesman (rejected) and Austin Chronicle (rejected)***

A variety of perspectives offer on point critiques of our City Mothers and Fathers, but what remains largely undiscussed is their unsurpassed ability at the game of malignant neglect. As practiced by our CM's it results in the quashing of issues, the silencing of critics and the crushing of citizens who dare to stand up for their rights. There is too much to cover in a short letter, so I'll confine myself to a couple of examples.

Randy Shade has known of the ugly case of Allissa Chambers, who won her suit in court against an approved and connected contractor. She was then starved out by the council's expenditure of \$177,000 in legal fees, this after offering to settle for a pittance. What have the citizens gained by squashing a now impoverished citizen who has already suffered at the hands of the city's approved minority contractor and our city officials despite proving her claims "in her day in court." Of what use are the courts when opposed by the deep pockets of the taxpayers misused by established powers.

Randy Shade committed to investigate before her election, as did CM Chris Riley before his. Then the CM's took their Oath of Office to uphold and obey the law - including taking action on criminal violations including any misuse of FEDERAL HOUSING & STIMULUS FUNDS. To his credit, CM Riley took an action, requesting a City Staff investigation, a Staff who are and were deeply involved in the possible criminal violations and mis/mal/nonfeasance of public office. He nevertheless accepted their evaluation that there was nothing further to be done. What did he expect of them, to hang themselves?

Now the Council votes unanimously to spend upwards of \$300,000 to defend themselves against open meetings violations. What is the value to us?

*Leslie Aisenman*

## Letters from Concerned Citizens

**Grave concerns as Corruption Continues -- Where is AAS?** (*Austin American Statesman*)To: "Fred Zipp" <[fzipp@statesman.com](mailto:fzipp@statesman.com)>

Hello Fred,

- Well, your previous response indicated that AAS investigative reporters were "on the beat" to ferret out corruption amidst public officials, yet the passage of several months reveals the continuing absence of investigative reporting from the *Austin American Statesman*. Albeit, informative reporting has occurred via an article here and there, but neither investigative reporting, nor follow-up to AAS' own informative reporting occurs--just a "passing-on" of information sans in-depth questions to the corruption sources and no revealing answers for the public. It is very clear to me that **AAS** is simply not interested and does not care to reveal corruption, so it continues in its PR promotion of the same, sprinkled with a few teasing articles to imply that maybe AAS is returning to its pre-1990s investigative reporting. But alas, results indicate AAS only teases the public while obtusely maintaining the stronghold of the entrenched political power brokers. Plain and simple, The *Austin American Statesman* just isn't interested. **Makes a citizen wonder what links thread the needle to an earlier financial bail out of a local corporate-owned local newspaper.**

- Though absent subtlety, AAS is adept at the 2-stepping / side-stepping dance its editors do with citizens' advocacy groups to feign active interest in uncovering corruption amidst local politicians by requesting reams of data from advocacy groups. But it is clearly and purposely a delaying "hands-off" tactic--an old visible and boring game, not to mention overtly insulting to Austin citizens. In the end, this strategy overcomes all but the most tenacious advocates. These reams of data should activate journalistic investigation if AAS would only serve the community, rather than promoting/endorsing corrupt political power brokers and out-of-town corporate development. Is it only wishful thinking that a syndicated local newspaper would do real investigative journalism and move the masses that truly care about Austin to actively protest? Isn't it a sad day for Austin when **AAS doesn't even produce any investigative journalism into the Holly Street contract award by City Council**, but only passes on information that any citizen can secure easily via a few conversations, phone calls and the social media?

- Similarly revealing is AAS' promotion/endorsements of the "same/same" include the PR article written by AAS reporter Sarah Coppola a month or so ago, gushingly praising incumbent council member Randy Shade. Yet Coppola, who requests reams of information from citizens and advocacy groups, fails to ask any relevant questions of incumbent power brokers, i.e. failure to investigate evidential data or even CM Shade's deleted emails, which reveal Shade's abandonment of her oath of office as well as her violation of the "Open Meetings" requirements. And now, AAS endorses incumbents without any justification other than reporters and editors' personal biases? Truly, what a travesty for a newspaper to write political PR and endorsements while failing to conduct investigative journalism--SHAM, SHAM and SHAME, SHAME on The *Austin American Statesman*.

- AND NOW, your curt and dismissive response to a citizen's inquiry expressing concerns over CM Mike Martinez entering the voting booth with his cell phone, which he used in clear violation of the law, to take a picture of his ballot. Your response, **"Whether his action was legal is for a judge and/or jury to decide,"** is revealing. Really? Why is AAS not interested in investigating and pursuing such a clear and documented violation of voting laws as well as a violation by CM Martinez of his Oath of Office? **"Whether his action was legal is for a judge and/or jury to decide"-- a dismissive statement too often used by local politicians to dismiss advocacy groups** who probe ever-so deeply and too closely into affairs of local politicians, only to have their "hands slapped" by AAS! That phrase is just another way for saying the AAS is part of the problem, and not interested in real investigative reporting that might get too close to the truth. Might the truth behind corruption amidst Austin's public officials get too close for your comfort? Was the bailout so good that AAS sold out on relevant and meaningful journalism, i.e. journalism that bites, rather than wags?

- Your recent statement, **"Our reporting is proceeding. When we achieve results that meet our standard for publication, you will see them in the newspaper,"** mocks itself. Your AAS currently produces sub-standard articles that hardly merit being called journalism. AAS even seems to pose little in the way of scrutiny into the signals of corruption in the midst of our public officials and produces no investigative journalism for Austin citizens. The list of questions from Austin citizens surrounding questionable City and County contract awards, the Holly Street demolition contract, stimulus funds expenditures, HUD housing funds and contract awards, as well as arbitrary and capricious decisions by City and County public officials--the list is virtually endless.

- The opportunity for "showing up" is upon us, but alas, AAS sits within its own shadows.

**J McCart**, Ph.DC

Cultural Mythologist, Texas Gray Panther

**Open Letter from a Texas Pioneer to Fred Zipp (editor Austin American Statesman) and All Professed Journalists**

- I am appalled by the apparent blatant disregard of citizen's rights and the "good-ol' boys" politicking that has too long been a part of Texas politics. We know that you and your newspaper have been provided with extensive documentation of the crimes committed in the name of our good people. Why haven't you followed up? Why haven't your reporters engaged in the kind of investigative reporting that might once again make the *Austin American Statesman* relevant to the world we live in? Instead of turning away and keeping your collective head in the sand you should be winning prizes for outstanding journalism and civic betterment. We don't want to believe that what was once our most important news source is now too tired and old to stand up for the right.

- We don't want to believe that you ignore or gloss over tales of corruption at City Hall. Don't you want to expose the rotten eggs? We hope this wasn't a part of any quid-pro-quo that your newspaper agreed to when the *Austin American Statesman* was bailed out of your financial difficulties. Was the hiring of Arnold Garcia, brother of former CM and Mayor Gus Garcia, to the top post of Editorial Page Editor, a part of that deal, to assure having an insider at the *Austin American Statesman*? Why is it when there's a problem in Austin Projects there's usually a Garcia or Garza involved?

- Fast forward to 2008. Why was it that immediately following a *Austin Chronicle* interview with Marc Ott, City Manager then and now, CM Mike Martinez demanded a meeting with Mr. Ott...a meeting which included Gus Garcia, Senator Gonzalo Barrientos and several leading Hispanic businessmen? Wonder what they wanted from Ott? Have/would they pressure Marc Ott and/or the *Austin American Statesman*? Can't your reporters connect the dots...I don't know, but seems to me you may not be serving the best interests of the CITIZENS OF AUSTIN...IF NOT US, WHOSE INTERESTS DO YOU SERVE?

Sincerely,

Laura Latham, Texas Pioneer (sixth generation Texan)