

DROWNING GOVERNMENT IN ANTIBIOTIC TAINTED CHINESE HONEY

Marion Nestle describes that the USDA is cutting back on basic research.

This decision, Neuman reports, “reflects a cold-blooded assessment of the economic usefulness”—translation: lack of political clout in the affected industry—of the 500 or so reports issued by the National Agriculture Statistics Service each year.

I was struck, in particular, by this report on the cutting block.

Annual Bee and Honey Report – Eliminate

Which I believe is this report:

This file contains the annual report of the number of colonies producing honey, yield per colony, honey production, average price, price by color class and value; honey stocks by state and U.S.

Why, at a time when people are struggling to understand colony collapse, would the government eliminate a report on how many colonies are producing honey? This is like eliminating a report on how many canaries die in coal mines just to make sure people don't become worried about imminent explosions.

There's another reason they might not want anyone tracking honey: because people are just copping onto the way producers hide the source of honey. (h/t RC)

I've been meaning to link to this story since it came out: it shows how producers are ultra

filtering honey to hide that it comes from China—which also serves to hide possible illegal antibiotics.

More than three-fourths of the honey sold in U.S. grocery stores isn't exactly what the bees produce, according to testing done exclusively for **Food Safety News**.

The results show that the pollen frequently has been filtered out of products labeled "honey."

The removal of these microscopic particles from deep within a flower would make the nectar flunk the quality standards set by most of the world's food safety agencies.

[snip]

In the U.S., the Food and Drug Administration says that any product that's been ultra-filtered and no longer contains pollen isn't honey. However, the FDA isn't checking honey sold here to see if it contains pollen.

Ultra filtering is a high-tech procedure where honey is heated, sometimes watered down and then forced at high pressure through extremely small filters to remove pollen, which is the only foolproof sign identifying the source of the honey. It is a spin-off of a technique refined by the Chinese, who have illegally dumped tons of their honey – some containing illegal antibiotics – on the U.S. market for years.

A honey industry spokesperson suggests you can assume honey that has been ultra filtered is

Removal of all pollen from honey "makes no sense" and is completely contrary to marketing the highest quality product possible, Mark Jensen, president of the

American Honey Producers Association, told Food Safety News.

"I don't know of any U.S. producer that would want to do that. Elimination of all pollen can only be achieved by ultra-filtering and this filtration process does nothing but cost money and diminish the quality of the honey," Jensen said.

"In my judgment, it is pretty safe to assume that any ultra-filtered honey on store shelves is Chinese honey and it's even safer to assume that it entered the country uninspected and in violation of federal law," he added.

Richard Adey, whose 80,000 hives in multiple states produce 7 million pounds of honey each year, told Food Safety News that "honey has been valued by millions for centuries for its flavor and nutritional value and that is precisely what is completely removed by the ultra-filtration process."

Incidentally, there's a pretty dramatic difference in what kind of honey you get based on where you buy it:

- *76 percent of samples bought at groceries had all the pollen removed, These were stores like TOP Food, Safeway, Giant Eagle, QFC, Kroger, Metro Market, Harris Teeter, A&P, Stop & Shop and King Soopers.*
- *100 percent of the honey sampled from*

drugstores like Walgreens, Rite-Aid and CVS Pharmacy had no pollen.

- *77 percent of the honey sampled from big box stores like Costco, Sam's Club, Walmart, Target and H-E-B had the pollen filtered out.*
- *100 percent of the honey packaged in the small individual service portions from Smucker, McDonald's and KFC had the pollen removed.*
- *Bryant found that every one of the samples Food Safety News bought at farmers markets, co-ops and "natural" stores like PCC and Trader Joe's had the full, anticipated, amount of pollen.*

Support your local farmer's market. They still care about birds—canaries in coal mines—and the bees.

OUR COUNTERTERRORISM POLICIES WILL MAKE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE WORSE

What place does this sound like?

Ruling elites ... do not see climate change as an immediate threat to their authority. They therefore feel free to take an opportunistic attitude toward climate change, supporting climate change mitigation policies that have collateral economic or political benefits to their particular interests.

Though it could be, it is not an indictment of our own country's refusal to do anything about climate change. Rather, it's one of a series of climate change studies and conferences the National Intelligence Council contracted to have done. This one describes the self-serving actions of the pre-Arab Spring authoritarian elite of North Africa.

As Steven Aftergood reported, the CIA is hiding the climate change analysis they're doing. They just rejected a FOIA for their climate change reports based on a claim that everything they have done is classified. So these reports, prominently labeled, "This paper does not represent US Government views," are one of the only public reads about what the intelligence community is doing with climate change.

Those contractor studies are interesting for several reasons. First, check out how they define their regions:

- China
- India
- Russia
- Southeast Asia and Pacific

Islands

- North Africa
- Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central America

The impact of climate change on the US, Europe, much of the Middle East, and most of Africa are all missing (or, at least, not public).

Shouldn't someone (not the CIA, which can't, but perhaps DOE) start thinking about how climate change will affect security in the US? How do you rationalize not including the Middle East (where water is already is source of conflict between Israel and its neighbors) or the Horn of Africa (where climate-related issues discussed in the North Africa studies have presented predictably catastrophic problems in countries that already pose other national security challenges to the US)? Why study India rather than South Asia as a whole, particularly given that Bangladesh will be one of the most impacted countries and (as reflected in the India report) will present India with a serious refugee problem. In short, there are real, critical gaps in the way the intelligence community at least publicly thinks of the potential impact of climate change.

I checked out the North Africa reports (commissioned report, conference report) to see how the intelligence community viewed the region two years before the Arab Spring. True, these reports analyze the impact of things like drought on agriculture and the impact of that on stability, but such analysis largely parallels the impact of neoliberal economic policies on agriculture and therefore on stability. Here's what the NIC was hearing about climate change and Ag and stability two years before the Arab Spring (these quotes come from the conference report):

An acute state failure to address climate change that results in intolerable conditions for significant segments of the population may constitute a sociopolitical

tipping point, in essence a breaking of the social compact between North African states and civil society. At that point, civil actors may determine that fundamental systemic change is necessary. The results of such a situation will depend on the specific reactions by state elites and by the public; reform, repression, or revolution are all possibilities. A combination of climatic stress and inadequate state responses over the next two decades could prove the catalyst for a major sociopolitical shift in North Africa. On the other hand, North Africans tend to hold a religiously based view that "what will be, will be." Owing to this fatalistic mindset, North Africans are unlikely to blame the state for climate related stresses, making it more difficult to attain the aforementioned tipping point.

Much later, the report predicts that the ancillary effects of climate change will be the cause of social stress.

The implications of climate change in North Africa—notably migration, stress on both rural and urban areas, unemployment, and increased resource competition—are likely to generate volatile sociopolitical conditions that will pose significant threats to the existing political structure. The responses of North African states to these threats may be more decisive for the fate of the region than their direct responses to climate change impacts. North African states have robust capacity to maintain social control in the face of domestic challenges and destabilization. **Regimes depend on a combination of entrenched patronage systems, robust *mukhabarat* (security) apparatuses, and the support of external allies**—a combination that has proven highly effective at maintaining political control. They have a track record of effectively suppressing dissent and unrest or remaining resilient where unrest has persisted, such as the civil conflict in Algeria.

States in the region may seek to suppress or distort information on climate change-related challenges. They seek to control access to any information that could provide a basis for opposition to the state, even information as seemingly innocuous as census data. **The proliferation of new media and alternative information sources, however, will make it difficult to maintain such censorship.** [my emphasis]

Particularly given our own IC's failure to take the warnings of unrest expressed via social media social media seriously, I find the warning that North African regimes would find it hard to censor this social unrest prescient.

And I find it richly ironic that the IC notes other countries would "seek to suppress or distort information on climate change-related challenges" when the CIA is doing just that in the US.

But I also find the description of these regimes' reliance on their allies chilling. This report always describes these regimes, several of them key allies of ours, as badly repressive regimes.

Although the level of repression varies between states, with Tunisia and Libya the most extreme, and has varied cyclically over time, authoritarian regimes are well entrenched in every state in the region.

The conference report acknowledges that the US focus on terrorism has narrowed its diplomatic focus with these countries, which in turn has strengthened the security apparatuses in the region—precisely the source of the repressive strength of the countries.

Security issues are the primary focus of US relations with North African states. The predominance of security and military concerns has led to disproportionate US engagement with security apparatuses in the region, strengthening regimes in ways that may damage long-term prospects to meet the

challenges of climate change. US policy in the region has become even more security-centric as a result of the continuing struggle against radical Islamic terrorism. While terrorism has deepened US security ties with states in the region, it has also narrowed the scope of US engagement, which may not be in the long-term interests of either party.

And then the report incorrectly suggests that the only likely challenge to these regimes if they fail to respond adequately to climate change would be Islamists.

Islamist groups have emerged as the only viable opposition force because they have resisted state cooptation and because the state has blocked other avenues for social mobilization. In addition, they have established a track record of effective humanitarian responses to mudslides, earthquakes, and other natural disasters, often providing immediate medical, shelter, and food aid that are normally the responsibilities of the state. In many cases Islamist groups may fill the void left by inadequate state responses or the weakness of other types of potential civil responders. Moderate Islamist groups could play a constructive role, providing highly visible humanitarian assistance that empowers autonomous civil actors and contrasts with ineffectual state responses, thus pressuring state actors to respond more effectively. Moderate Islamists could use the climate change mitigation issue to bolster their argument that existing North African governments are illegitimate and exploitative, creating momentum for political reform.

On the other hand, Islamic extremists across the region may exploit climate change's destabilizing impacts and ineffective state responses to promote the spread of militancy and anti-regime violence. Indeed, Islamist militants

could point to climate-induced catastrophes as evidence of God's wrath against "apostate regimes" whose un-Islamic behavior has plunged the region into desperate circumstances.

In other words, while the report doesn't lay out the the logical case it makes explicitly, it nevertheless argues that:

- The repressive nature of these regimes may make them less likely to respond adequately to climate change
- Our single-minded focus on terrorism tends to make these countries even more repressive
- If these countries don't respond to climate change, it may provide an opportunity for precisely the Islamists our single-minded counter-terrorism focus is designed to combat

In other words, this conference report suggests (though does not say so explicitly, perhaps because it was written by contractors intent on getting paid) that in the presence of a stress like climate change, our counter-terrorism approach may be self-defeating.

Now, again, this report wasn't written by our spooks and it "does not represent US Government views." Our policy makers may not agree with this report's analysis, or they may be ignoring it (seeing no "collateral political or economic benefits to their particular interests"). And if you buy my premise that the stress of climate change is similar to the stress caused by an embrace of neoliberalism, then the report badly underestimated both the success of those challenging these regimes and the centrality of Islamists in these countries.

There's a lot else that could be said about these reports (such as their too-narrow focus on the Ag in each particular country, when recent food price shocks make it clear such stress will play out at broader levels).

But more generally, the report suggests that our counterterrorism policies are making countries around the world less resilient to climate change (and so presumably to a range of other stresses as well).

BILL DALEY PREPARING TO RUIN ANOTHER DEMOCRAT'S ELECTION CHANCES

The environmental community is beginning to worry that the Obama Administration is preparing to cave on greenhouse gas emissions, just like it did on ozone emissions.

Hard on the heels of the Obama administration's decision earlier this month to scrap a new rule for ozone emissions, U.S. EPA appears poised to miss another major regulatory deadline – this time for greenhouse gas emissions.

Environmentalists are reserving judgment about the fact the agency has yet to send its proposed rule for greenhouse gas emissions from utilities to the White House Office of Management and Budget for vetting, a necessary final step before the rule can be released in compliance with the court-ordered deadline of Sept. 30.

But conservationists warn that if the administration delays another important rule for apparently political reasons, it will

face stiff opposition from its sometime-allies in the green community.

"It's starting to look as if EPA might blow another deadline," said Frank O'Donnell, president of Clean Air Watch. "That would be very disturbing."

That's particularly troubling given what we've learned about the ozone cave. We know the Business Roundtable wrote Bill Daley personally with their exaggerated claims about the ozone rules. And when environmental groups responded by emphasizing how popular clean air is, Daley ignored them—only to respond when those same business groups implied ozone regulations would be unpopular in swing states. (h/t David Roberts)

On Aug. 16, Mr. Daley met with environmental, public-health and other groups to discuss the Environmental Protection Agency rule that would tighten air-quality standards. At one point he lamented that the issue couldn't be worked out by consensus with industry, as the White House did with the auto industry on fuel-economy rules.

When the American Lung Association mentioned a poll showing public support for EPA standards, Mr. Daley appeared uninterested, according to one person in the room. "He literally cut the person off and said 'I don't give a [expletive] about the poll'," this person said. A senior White House official said Mr. Daley wanted to hear arguments about the substance of the regulation and its impact, not political arguments, and he was uninterested in all polls on this topic.

The same day, Mr. Daley met with industry groups, who gave the White House a map showing counties that would be out of compliance with the Clean Air Act if the stricter standards were put in place. The map showed that the rule would affect areas

in the politically important 2012 election states of Florida, Pennsylvania, Virginia and Ohio.

And now the Business Roundtable speaks openly about maintaining that kind of influence over these decisions.

"We saw that as a positive – his level of interest, him sitting in on these meetings, him weighing in on this issue within the administration," Johanna Schneider, executive director of external relations for the Business Roundtable, told The Hill. "I think it's emblematic of his role in the administration as part of the outreach to the business community."

[snip]

"It moved the issue up to the top of the agenda for the president. That is what happens when you have a White House chief of staff getting involved," Schneider said. "You have one of the two or three people in government who can control the agenda."

American Petroleum Institute President Jack Gerard said he's hopeful the ozone decision foreshadows increased White House involvement in rulemakings.

"We are hopeful that all decisions will be scrutinized as closely as the ozone decision, because a lot of regulatory overreach is what creates the uncertainty that keeps the investment money on the sidelines," Gerard said in an interview.

Now maybe it's true that insisting that businesses not poison our children would be political unpopular in key swing states—or maybe not.

The point is, these decisions are being made for political reasons. And the person making those decisions appears to be Bill Daley (helped by Cass Sunstein).

You know. Bill Daley? The guy who couldn't get

Al Gore elected at a time of historical prosperity (even if it was a bubble)? The guy who pushed decisions like separation from a popular president and caving on the FL recount that led directly to Gore being unsuccessful at pressing his victory?

Maybe the White House is right to make bad environmental decisions for pragmatic political reasons (though I doubt it). But Bill Daley is probably not the guy you want making that call, because he has a pretty remarkable history of poor political judgment.

TRUE “RESILIENCE” WOULD HELP PREVENT THE NEXT 3,420 CLIMATE-RELATED DEATHS, TOO

This article—showing how many stupid projects have been funded in the name of homeland security in the last decade—has been making the rounds. Everyone has been pointing to its details on how few people have died in terrorist attacks.

“The number of people worldwide who are killed by Muslim-type terrorists, Al Qaeda wannabes, is maybe a few hundred outside of war zones. It’s basically the same number of people who die drowning in the bathtub each year,” said John Mueller, an Ohio State University professor who has written extensively about the balance between threat and expenditures in fighting terrorism.

“So if your chance of being killed by a terrorist in the United States is 1 in 3.5 million, the question is, how much do you

want to spend to get that down to 1 in 4.5 million?" he said.

[snip]

Only 14 Americans have died in about three dozen instances of Islamic extremist terrorist plots targeted at the U.S. outside war zones since 2001 – most of them involving one or two home-grown plotters.

Returning to the National Climatic Data Center data I was looking at the other day, 3,420 people have died since 9/11 in big weather disasters:

2002:	28
2003:	131
2004:	168
2005:	2,002
2006:	95
2007:	22
2008:	296
2009:	26
2010:	46
2011	634 (counting 40 thus far in Irene)
Total:	3,420

Now I raise this not just to make the obvious point that we would be better off dumping some of this money into dealing with climate change, but also to make a point about the theme Obama is pushing for this year's commemoration of 9/11: resilience.

The White House has issued detailed guidelines to government officials on how to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks, with instructions to honor the memory of those who died on American soil but also to recall that Al Qaeda and other extremist groups have since carried out attacks elsewhere in the world, from Mumbai to Manila.

The White House in recent days has quietly disseminated two sets of documents. One is framed for overseas allies and their citizens and was sent to American embassies

and consulates around the globe. The other includes themes for Americans here and underscores the importance of national service and what the government has done to prevent another major attack in the United States.

[snip]

One significant new theme is in both sets of documents: Government officials are to warn that Americans must be prepared for another attack – and must, in response, be resilient in recovering from the loss.

“Resilience takes many forms, including the dedication and courage to move forward,” according to the guidelines for foreign audiences. “While we must never forget those who we lost, we must do more than simply remember them –we must sustain our resilience and remain united to prevent new attacks and new victims.”

[snip]

Resilience is a repeated theme of the communications. “We celebrate the resilience of communities across the globe,” the foreign guidelines state.

I applaud the appeal to “resilience” in the scope of terrorism. True resilience would do far more in the event of an attack than the Zodiac dive boat, cattle nose leads and electric prods, and \$750,000 terrorism fences described by the LAT.

But it’s not clear the deficit cutting obsessed Administration is talking about resilience. It’s not talking about maintaining existing bridges and building redundant ones close to key trucking routes; it’s not addressing our decrepit drinking and waste water infrastructure; it’s not done anything to fix the 1,819 high hazard potential dams in this country; it’s not addressing even the shoddy electrical grid supplying the nation’s capital.

Granted, Obama is pushing a highway bill, though early reports say it'll be a mere fraction of the 2.2 trillion needed to shore up our nation's infrastructure.

Not only would investing in our country's infrastructure make us truly resilient in the event of another attack (and create jobs), but it would also help localities better withstand—or at least recover from—many (though not all) severe weather events, which will likely become more frequent in the next decade.

Given that more people have died from severe weather in this country over the last decade than terrorism (even including 9/11), we really ought to be dumping the money we have been investing in fancy dive boats in climate change instead. But barring that, we at least ought to be doing the kinds of things that will make us more resilient—to both terrorist attacks and climate disasters.

PAYING FOR CLIMATE CHANGE BY GUTTING PROGRAMS TO DEAL WITH IT

Brian Beutler has a post predicting that Eric Cantor will do the same thing with Irene disaster aid he did with hypothetical aid to his own constituents after the earthquake: demand budget cuts to pay for any aid.

Now, in the wake of Hurricane Irene – a much costlier natural disaster – Cantor may make the same demand, which could touch off a bitter fight on Capitol Hill.

“We aren’t going to speculate on damage before it happens, period,” his staff told

me Thursday when I asked about the impending storm. "But, as you know, Eric has consistently said that additional funds for federal disaster relief ought to be offset with spending cuts."

This is a big problem. The budget is already stretched very thin, and even Cantor has asked his members not to provoke another fight about cutting spending beyond its already agreed-upon levels. And if clean-up costs reach into the billions, paying for it by cutting spending will damage other important services, despite the fact that the usual standard is to not use natural disasters as political bargaining chips.

Three things are going on here by my count. First, Republicans have learned an obvious lesson since they retook the House – that they can control the agenda in Washington, and put popular government programs under attack, if and only if they have some leverage over Democrats to play along. The government shutdown fight in April was their first victory. The debt limit showdown was their *piece de resistance*.

Second, there are political pitfalls to this approach, particularly when it requires Republicans to publicly stake out specific positions. Cutting government spending might focus group well, but privatizing Medicare does not, as Republicans learned quite painfully earlier this year. This augurs for slashing spending in nebulous ways – capping discretionary spending, and spreading the cuts out across myriad federal programs; or promising to "find monies" in the budget to offset new expenses. Death by a thousand, invisible cuts.

Third, the right flank of the Republican party expects no less. In 2005, after Hurricane Katrina devastated southern Louisiana, Cantor's predecessor, Rep. Tom DeLay (R-TX) claimed Republicans had pared discretionary spending back enough that

federal aid could be financed with new debt. He came under attack from members of his own party and quickly reversed himself. Looks like Cantor learned his lesson.

At issue is, in part, the number of disasters FEMA has had to respond to, which has sapped its disaster release funds.

The size of Irene matters because the Federal Emergency Management Agency disaster relief fund has dipped below a key threshold.

It is now at \$792 million, congressional sources said Friday. Normally when the fund dips below \$1 billion, FEMA announces it can only meet the most immediate needs such as clearing debris.

On Saturday FEMA announced that because the fund had reached \$792 million, it had in fact reached immediate needs status.

The announcement prompted House GOP appropriators to blast the administration for allowing the FEMA funding standoff to continue to this point.

[snip]

Before Hurricane Irene and the Virginia earthquake, 2011 saw historic Mississippi river valley flooding, North Dakota flooding, and massive tornados in the Midwest and South.

The agency told Congress this summer it could need up to \$4 billion more in funding for a total of \$6.8 billion in 2012.

What all remains unsaid in this is that climate change is likely contributing to the increased disaster expenses this year. NOAA has a catalog of the nine "weather disasters" that caused more than \$1 billion in damages this year (this would not include the earthquake in any case, and only goes through August 15). In total, these events have done more than \$35 billion in damage, which is a record (again, that's before Irene's

damages), and killed at least 594 people. Here's the damage done:

1. Groundhog Day blizzard, January 29- February 3: \$1.1 billion in insured losses, over \$2 billion total. 36 deaths
2. Midwest/Southeast tornadoes, April 4-5: \$1.6 billion in insured losses, over \$2.3 billion total, 9 deaths
3. Southeast/Midwest tornadoes, April 8-11, 2011: \$1.5 billion in insured losses, over \$2.2 billion total, zero deaths
4. Midwest/Southeast tornadoes, April 14-16: \$1.4 billion in insured losses, over \$2 billion total, 38 deaths
5. Southeast/Ohio Valley/Midwest tornadoes, April 25-30: \$6.6 billion in insured losses, over \$9.0 billion total, 327 deaths
6. Midwest/Southeast tornadoes, May 22-27: \$4.9 in insured losses, over \$7.0 billion total, 177 deaths
7. Southern Plains/Southwest drought, heatwave, and wildfires, spring-summer: direct losses of over \$5 billion
8. Mississippi River flooding, spring-summer: ongoing

losses estimated at \$2.0-
\$4.0 billion, 2 deaths

9. Upper Midwest flooding,
summer: ongoing losses over
\$2.0 billion, at least 5
deaths

Add to that the \$2.6 billion in estimated
insured losses with Irene (though as much as a
billion of that is in the Caribbean) and at
least 25 deaths in the US, and those billions
and those deaths begin to add up.

Yet in response, the Republicans have been
targeting programs—like clean energy vehicles—as
their “offsets” to disaster funding.

At some point, we’re going to need to address
this as “climate change” rather than just
“serial Mother Nature” requiring budget offsets.

Perhaps the way to force that issue is to point
out who is suffering because of this. The
biggest number of deaths came in Alabama and
Missouri, not the elite East Coast. The big
damages came in states like Texas, Oklahoma,
Missouri, Alabama, Tennessee, the Dakotas.

Climate change exacerbated weather events are
devastating red states as much as the blue
states Irene just hit. It is time to stop
treating them as discrete events, paid for by
cutting some of the same core government
functions helping to deal with climate change
generally. If Republicans are going to make this
a fight, it’s time to finally start pointing to
how climate change denialism is killing the
constituents of those denialists.

CANTORQUAKE:

TREMBLING AT THE HEART OF GOP CLAIMS WE DON'T NEED GOVERNMENT

Back in March, after the Japanese earthquake, Eric Cantor defended Republican plans to cut funding from the USGS and warning systems to help in case of a disaster.

This is the epicenter of the freak 5.9 Richter earthquake that just hit Virginia.



Here's the location of the Anna 1 and 2 nuclear power plants, which lost power ~~and are now operating on diesel backup generators~~. Power has now been restored.



And here's a partial map of Eric Cantor's district. (h/t lpsrocks)



Update: Maps and Anna plant news updated. Text removed.

Update: The NRC apparently ranks this nuclear power plant as the 7th most likely to be hit by an earthquake.

The United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission has ranked the earthquake damage risk at all 104 nuclear power plants in this country. The pair operated by Dominion Power, at Lake Anna in eastern Louisa County, come in at 7th most 'at risk' on the list.

According to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, North Anna 1 and 2 face an annual 1 in 22,727 chance of the core being damaged by an earthquake and exposing the public to radiation.

Update: Apparently, budget cuts in the 1990s led to the removal of seismic equipment at the North Anna plant. (h/t Kirk)

The Virginia Tech Seismological Observatory (VTSO) is one of the primary sources for data on seismic activity in the central East Coast. In 1963, as part of the worldwide program, seismographs were installed at Blacksburg, and in 1977 several more seismographs were stationed in the Commonwealth and operated by the Virginia Division of Geology and Mineral Resources. Some of these instruments were stationed around the North Anna Nuclear Power plant, but in the 1990's, due to budget cuts, most

of the North Anna sensors were taken off line. Along with other southeastern regional seismic networks and the U.S. National Seismic Network, VTSO contributes to seismic hazard assessment in the southeastern United States and compiles a Southeastern U.S. Earthquake Catalog.

Cantor was in VA's House of Delegates from 1992 to 2001, so there's a decent chance he had a part in those budget cuts.

Update: Bob Alvarez at POGO provides some detail on the North Anna plant.

According to a representative of Dominion Power, the two reactors were designed to withstand a 5.9-6.1 quake.

[snip]

The North Anna reactors are of the Westinghouse Pressurized Water design and went on line in 1979 and 1980 respectively. Since then the reactors have generated approximately 1,200 metric tons of nuclear spent fuel containing about 228,000 curies of highly radioactive materials—among the largest concentrations of radioactivity in the United States.

Nearly 40 percent of the radioactivity in the North Anna spent fuel pools is cesium-137—a long-lived radioisotope that gives off potentially dangerous penetrating radiation and also accumulates in food over a period of centuries. The North Anna Pools hold about 15-30 times more Cs-137 than was released by the Chernobyl accident in 1986. In 2003, IPS helped lead a study warning that drainage of a pool might cause a catastrophic radiation fire, which could render an area uninhabitable greater than that created by the Chernobyl accident.

The spent fuel pools at North Anna contain 4-5 times more than their original designs intended. As in Japan, all U.S. power nuclear power plant spent fuel pools do not

have steel lined, concrete barriers that cover reactor vessels to prevent the escape of radioactivity.

JEFF IMMELT CLAIMS GOVERNMENT CAN'T MAKE HIM INVEST-IGNORING IT ALREADY DID

[youtube]Df_XSkDz418[/youtube]

Jeff “China China China” Immelt spoke at Dartmouth yesterday, ostensibly about energy. But as it happens, he had the opportunity (in question period) to pressure SuperCongress to “reform” taxes rather than raise them on people like Immelt (while later saying he didn’t think SuperCongress should also look at job creation). He claimed GE would embrace the elimination of loopholes, so long as the corporate tax rate was also lowered.

The largest U.S. conglomerate would accept the elimination of loopholes “in a heartbeat” if it was coupled with a lowering of the statutory 35 percent rate, Jeff Immelt told a group of students on Thursday.

Right. We’re to take Immelt’s word that GE will stop taking advantage of any means to evade taxes based on its own history of evading taxes.

Which, in combination with Immelt’s comments about investing are all the more interesting. Here’s how Reuters described it.

Immelt, who leads a panel advising the Obama administration on job creation,

said he puts little stock in talk that the government could do more to encourage companies to invest and lower the nation's persistently high unemployment rate.

"A lot has been said that business isn't investing because of uncertainty. I think that's rubbish," the 55-year-old CEO said. **"The government couldn't do anything to make me invest** and believe me the rest of the world isn't that stable either. We've made our own choices that we're going to keep investing regardless of what happens in Washington."

But in an uncharacteristically animated moment, he blasted critics who contend that companies like GE that do much of their sales outside the United States are hurting the economy. He noted that GE sells 90 percent of its jet engines abroad but manufactures all of them in U.S. factories.

"That's not taking jobs out of the United States, that's what we have to do," Immelt said. "We've gotten this psychotic thing that anybody that does business outside the United States is a heathen, anti-American ... I don't understand why we're rooting against companies that are out there competing because we're creating good jobs here."
[my emphasis]

Now there's actually more than this going on. First, in response to a question (around 42:10) about allegations that GE doesn't pay taxes, Immelt shifted the answer to claim, incorrectly, that people were beating up on GE for exporting, rather than beating up on GE for not paying taxes. So rather than talking about tax evasion, he instead talked about how many jet engines GE exports from the US. And when, later (around 52:00), he was asked whether all the energy

products GE sells in India and China were made in the US, he again focused on jet engines (energy products?) and gas turbines.

In other words, he avoided talking about taxes by pretending all GE does does export large manufactured goods. (More interesting, too, though probably worth another post, is his exhortation—around 50:00—that you shouldn't watch TV or read the news, said in the context of the crash, "everybody had to wake up and realize you gotta change," without admitting that GE's financial games were a huge part of the crash.)

And yes, Immelt says that the government can't do anything to make GE invest—though in context it appeared to say the government can't make GE invest here (as opposed to other countries—he noted that investments in energy are primarily happening in Europe and China).

I find that claim, in particular, interesting given how GE is claiming credit for creating a greater proportion of jobs in the US. But the big headline item—a tech center in the Detroit area—happened precisely because of government intervention.

Chief Executive Officer Jeffrey Immelt has said GE will add more than 15,000 jobs in the three years through December. About 1,100 will be just outside Detroit in a center for information technology, a field emblematic of outsourcing. So far, GE has hired about 660 people in Michigan, a state that led the nation in jobless rates, making it a symbol of U.S. industrial decline.

[snip]

GE took advantage of incentives such as Michigan's tax benefits and skilled workforce. Immelt said in announcing the Michigan site in 2009 that GE would invest \$100 million, while state officials offered more than \$60 million over 12 years in incentives.

“The change in approach is critical, and it comes right from the top,” said Harley Shaiken, a labor professor at the University of California at Berkeley. “He’s addressed it both from the context of GE and in the importance of the U.S. having a vibrant, high-tech manufacturing base.”

So I guess the government can do something to make Jeff Immelt’s company invest in the US. But for some reason he didn’t want to talk about it.

In a recent op-ed, Alliance for American Manufacturing head Scott Paul offered a number of suggestions to rebuild manufacturing in the US. Among other worthy suggestions, he suggested what might be called the “Immelt Rule”—banishing CEOs from federal advisory boards (like Obama’s job’s council) if they’re outsourcing faster than they’re creating jobs here in the US.

Kick any CEO off of federal advisory boards or jobs councils who has: (1) not created net new American jobs over the past five years, or (2) is expanding the company’s foreign workforce at a faster rate than its domestic workforce. Replace them with CEOs who are committed to investing in America. Shame is a good motivator.

I guess Immelt would rather just talk about exporting jet engines and be done with it.

THE NEW AG BUBBLE AND CLIMATE CHANGE

The Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago is worried enough about rising farm land values in the Midwest it is holding a conference to discuss

it. Here in the Midwest, prices have gone up 17% in the last year.

And Bloomberg has a piece describing bankster types scouring farmland the world over for farms.

"I have frequently told people that one of the best investments in the world will be farmland," says Jim Rogers, 68, chairman of Singapore-based Rogers Holdings, who predicted the start of the global commodities rally in 1996. "You've got to buy in a place where it rains, and you have to have a farmer who knows what he's doing. If you can do that, you will make a double whammy because the crops are becoming more valuable."

The growth in demand for food, spurred by the rising middle classes in China, India and other emerging markets, shows no signs of abating. Food prices in June, as measured by a United Nations index of 55 food commodities, were just slightly below their peak in February. The UN's Food and Agriculture Organization said in a June report that it expects food costs to remain high through 2012.

So many investors have rushed to capitalize on food prices in the past three years that they may be creating a farmland bubble. The Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City, which covers Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska and other agricultural states, said in May that farmland prices had surged 20 percent in the first quarter compared with a year earlier.

"Yes, farmland will be a bubble again; all agricultural products will be in a bubble again," says Rogers, who is an investor in Agrifirma Brazil Ltd., a South American farmland owner.

Now, I'm interested (and concerned) about the way this will lead to problematic relations between investors and the farmers actually doing the work ("Feudalism returns," Muniland's Cate

Long says).

But I'm even more rather amazed that the discussion of this doesn't mention climate change.

Sure, the increase in prices is, in the short term, driven by demand in places like China.

The hedge fund Diggle co-founded, Artradis Fund Management Pte in Singapore, suffered about \$700 million in losses. He closed it in March and opened another Singapore-based hedge fund, Vulpes Investment Management Pte. Diggle plans to incorporate his five farms into an investment management group run by Vulpes.

From his vantage point in Asia, where the British expatriate has worked for the past two decades, Diggle says he's witnessed aspiring locals eating their way up the food chain.

"You can see what a more prosperous China will consume," Diggle, 47, says. "It means more dairy, more meat – not just pork and chicken."

But this year's near-record food prices are tied, too, to weird weather and other disasters: fires in Russia and floods in Australia. Whether or not those disasters were tied to climate change, climate change already has changed productivity.

Sure, the horizon of investment here may be shorter than that which will see areas of the Midwest take on an increasing role in feeding the rest of the country as other parts become less farmable. But that horizon is not that far out.

This farm buying craze may well be a bubble. Or it may be the leading edge of financial changes tied to climate change.

“SUSTAINABLE GROWTH” WASN’T

There’s something that bugged me about this article (indeed, bugs me about most economic analyses of our current crash). Amidst a discussion that fairly lays out some of the problems with the global economy (all the while ignoring that one critical issue in the US is a gutting of manufacture and unions and therefore increasing inequality), it talks about how to rebalance the global economy so as to return to “sustainable growth.”

What it failed to create, however, was the kind of virtuous cycle of growing sales, growing profits and growing employment, all feeding off of one another, to keep the economy growing even as the stimulus wears off – “escape velocity,” to borrow a term from aerodynamics.

[snip]

The truth is we’re in something of a trap. Until imbalances are corrected, the U.S. and global economies are unlikely to return to robust and sustainable growth. And yet to the extent that we address these imbalances, the correction process will inevitably be a short-term drag on an already weak economy.

I mean, aside from Pearlstein’s blind reverence for the market, he’s right about the notion of balance. It is true, for example, that the newly rebalanced globe, America will play a smaller role as the consumer of last resort.

But it’d be nice if, at the same time as analysts think about rebalancing the global

economy, they'd consider what their idea of "sustainable growth" meant in the past—and what it would mean in the future if it continued unchecked. After all, the sustainable-growth-that-turned-out-to-be-unsustainable of the last 60 years of a globalized economy caused climate change which will be an increasing drain on even a growing economy as disasters become worse and more frequent.

The spending on unnecessary consumer goods, the transportation miles driven, the dietary patterns, the waste. Those things caused climate change. Those are the things economists would like to return to, if slightly adjusted around the globe.

Since we're going to be spending the next couple of years trying to find "sustainable growth," do you think we could also keep in mind what would be truly sustainable for the globe?

TORNADOES, AUSTERITY, AND FOOD STAMPS

In one of my posts on drones, I noted that we have had more deaths this year in AL (238) and MO (159) because of extreme tornadoes the severity of which is probably at least due partly to climate change than we have from terrorism.

But there's something else that seems to have happened.

Meteor Blades has a post cataloging how many more people are relying on food stamps this month—45.8 million, or close to 15% of the country. He links to the state-level data, which reveals a huge spike in AL's use of food stamps. In April 2011, 868,813 Alabamians used

food stamps—a worse than average but not abysmal 18% of its population. In May, that number spiked to 1,762,481, over 37% of the population, almost 900,000 new people getting food stamps.

Incidentally, the only people from AL's congressional delegation to vote no on the debt ceiling vote this week—Martha Robey, Mo Brooks, Richard Shelby, and Jeff Sessions—did so from the right.

Assuming these numbers are right (the numbers reported for new applicants—100,000 from hard-hit Jefferson County—seem to support them), there's still a good reason why so many Alabamans are relying on federal aid to feed themselves: the devastating tornadoes in April. In response, the state rolled out special sign-up processes, turning around applications in three days time. Though, at least from some quarters, there was skepticism about whether people were applying because of the tornado, or more generalized need.

At the very least, the reliance of over a third of Alabamans on food stamps, half of them in response to the tornadoes, suggests one more cost from this crazy weather.

But it will be interesting to see what happens to these numbers in subsequent months. Will these numbers return to “normal,” reflecting an appropriate and short term response to a disaster (even if it is one Alabama's legislators all refuse to pay for)? Or are we seeing a poor state come to rely on the government for bare necessities once it becomes easy to apply?