

DOJ'S TWISTED NOTION OF RULE OF LAW IS POISONING OUR COUNTRY

Yesterday, Tim DeChristopher was sentenced to 2 years and a \$10,000 fine for his successful efforts to expose an improper BLM drilling auction.

At his hearing, DeChristopher rebutted the prosecution's claim that he needed to face a tough sentence to uphold rule of law.

Mr. Huber also makes grand assumptions about my level of respect for the rule of law. The government claims a long prison sentence is necessary to counteract the political statements I've made and promote a respect for the law.

[snip]

This is really the heart of what this case is about. The rule of law is dependent upon a government that is willing to abide by the law. Disrespect for the rule of law begins when the government believes itself and its corporate sponsors to be above the law.

Mr. Huber claims that the seriousness of my offense was that I "obstructed lawful government proceedings." But the auction in question was not a lawful proceeding. I know you've heard another case about some of the irregularities for which the auction was overturned. But that case did not involve the BLM's blatant violation of Secretarial Order 3226, which was a law that went into effect in 2001 and required the BLM to weigh the impacts on climate change for all its major decisions, particularly resource development. A federal judge in Montana

ruled last year that the BLM was in constant violation of this law throughout the Bush administration. In all the proceedings and debates about this auction, no apologist for the government or the BLM has ever even tried to claim that the BLM followed this law. In both the December 2008 auction and the creation of the Resource Management Plan on which this auction was based, the BLM did not even attempt to follow this law.

[snip]

I'm not saying any of this to ask you for mercy, but to ask you to join me. If you side with Mr. Huber and believe that your role is to discourage citizens from holding their government accountable, then you should follow his recommendations and lock me away. I certainly don't want that. I have no desire to go to prison, and any assertion that I want to be even a temporary martyr is false. I want you to join me in standing up for the right and responsibility of citizens to challenge their government. I want you to join me in valuing this country's rich history of nonviolent civil disobedience.

And in response, of course, the judge did lock DeChristopher away. It's a farce given the facts of the case, but consider how it looks when, as DeChristopher invites, you consider DOJ's other efforts to "uphold rule of law."

Compare the damage—if any—DeChristopher's actions did to that which BP has done. As bmaz noted in April, a year after the Macondo explosion, no one has yet been held accountable for 11 deaths, to say nothing of the physical damage to the Gulf. And as Jason Leopold recently reported, our unwillingness to heed whistleblowers has led to more damage from BP. Part of the problem, of course, is the

difficulty finding a judge without a financial interest in BP.

Or compare DeChristopher's punishment with that of Massey energy. DOJ has records that Massey faked safety records for the Big Branch mine, yet over a year after 29 people were killed, no one has been held responsible. Don Blankenship not only got to retire with \$12 million, he continues to get paid by the company as a "consultant."

Or compare DeChristopher's punishment with that of Angelo Mozilo or Lloyd Blankfein. Between them, they had a huge role in causing Americans trillions of dollars in preventable losses. After fining Mozilo \$67 million he won't pay personally, DOJ judged that Mozilo's actions did not constitute criminal wrongdoing, so he remains free to enjoy his corruptly gained riches. And in spite of the apparent fact that Blankfein lied to Congress last year about the ways Goldman crashed the economy, DOJ has only now begun to make motions of investigating his lies.

And consider the others who tried to expose government wrong-doing. The government spent three years trying to prosecute Thomas Drake for whistleblowing—apparently because they suspected he leaked details of the illegal wiretap program. And it is currently pursuing a strategy that may land James Risen in prison—Risen says, in retaliation for his reporting on the illegal wiretap program. Yet DOJ went to great lengths to avoid holding anyone responsible for actually doing the illegal wiretapping.

We're about to try Abd al Rahim al-Nashiri for his alleged role in the USS Cole bombing, which is fine. But the government not only hasn't punished his torturers, but it hasn't punished those who destroyed exonerating evidence of his torture.

DOJ has apparently given up any pretense of supporting the rule of law. The law is a tool used to punish political protest and exposure of

wrong-doing. And it is a tool to protect the corporations whose crimes do far more damage to this country.

John Robb recently predicted that after a Soviet-style collapse, our legal system will collapse.

What happens to the legal system when the US suffers a Soviet style collapse?

Answer: It will rapidly decay.

Here's a simple formula for this (it works for both legal systems and government bureaucracies):

Low legitimacy + slashed operating budgets = rampant corruption

Regardless of any decay in the legal system, business will still be conducted. Small disputes will be resolved through the existing system, with graft tipping the scales or speeding the outcome. Large disputes involving substantial wealth transfer will be something else entirely. These disputes will be resolved through the ability of one party or the other to apply the threat of (or actual) violence to the negotiation process.

These pressures won't only be the result of counterparties that have access or control the large mafias/gangs/militias (or corporate militaries) that will spring up during economic collapse (far larger than we've seen the US to date).

Threats will also be mounted by government/defense/security officials that use their government sanctioned command of violence (police, SWAT, military units, etc.) as a means to personal enrichment.

But (as his suggestion about the impunity people like Mozilo and Blankfein were given shows) he gets the chronology wrong. Aside from the bribed

BP judges, it's not corruption per se that is collapsing our judicial system. It's the apparently conscious choice on the part of the government to void the concept of rule of law, the choice to treat political speech and whistleblowing as a much greater crime than the corporate crimes that have devastated our country.

I think DeChristopher is right: seeing his sentence isn't going to scare anyone into cowing in the face of such a capricious legal system. Rather, it makes it clear what the stakes are.

FAMINE IN SOMALIA OUGHT TO LEAD US TO RETHINK WAR ON TERROR

In the US, most of the news on Somalia in recent days has focused on the war on terror. First, there was the arrest of alleged al-Shabaab figure Ahmed Abdulkadir Warsame. Then there was Jeremy Scahill's important piece on the CIA's black site in Somalia. And then the push to conflate al-Shabaab with Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula with al Qaeda.

Somalia, you see, is all about the war on terror.

Except that it's also the focal point of what the UN has now declared is a growing famine in the Horn of Africa.

Which really ought to make us question our priorities globally.


Check out the list of factors behind the famine.

The current crisis in southern Somalia is driven by a combination of factors:-

- *The total failure of the October-December Deyr rains (secondary season) and the poor performance of the April-June Gu rains (primary season) have resulted in crop failure, reduced labor demand, poor livestock body conditions, and excess animal mortality*
- *Local cereal prices across the south are far above average, more than 2 to 3 times 2010 prices in some areas, and continue to rise. As a result, both livestock to cereal and wage to cereal terms of trade have deteriorated substantially. Across all livelihoods, poor households (~30 percent of the population) are unable to meet basic food needs and have limited ability to cope with these food deficits*
- *During July, FSNAU conducted 17 representative nutrition and mortality surveys across southern Somalia; results are*

available for 11 surveys. The prevalence of acute malnutrition exceeds 20 percent in all areas and is higher than 38 percent (with severe acute malnutrition higher than 14 percent) in 9 of the 11 survey areas. The highest recorded levels of acute malnutrition are in Bay, Bakool, and Gedo (agropastoral) where the GAM prevalence exceeds 50 percent. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has verified these findings

- Population-wide death rates are above the famine threshold (2/10,000/day) in two areas (Bakool agropastoral, and all areas of Lower Shabelle) and are elevated across the south. Under-5 death rates are higher than 4/10,000/day in all areas of the south where data is available, peaking at 13-20/10,000/day in



*riverine and
agropastoral areas of
Lower Shabelle. Tens of
thousands of people
have died in the past
three months.1*

One of these issues—the 2-300% increase in cereal prices—can be tied at least partly to commodity speculation, the gambling over foodstuffs that helps companies like Goldman Sachs get richer.

And the part of that price increase that doesn't come from commodity speculation—that is, the part of that price increase tied to real market issues—derives largely from catastrophic weather. The failed rains in East Africa are just one part of that. More important to the world market are the drought and fires in Russia and the floods in Australia. And while we can't prove that the last year's freakish weather is a very tangible sign that climate change has started to affect our day-to-day life, there's little doubt that climate change is a big part of it.

Now, you can't actually separate al-Shabaab's presence in Somalia from its famine; the absence of a functioning government, after all, is what leads to famine. And al-Shabaab's presence makes it more difficult for aid organizations to work.

But it's unclear that launching drone strikes on Somalia is the best way we can help them. It's probably not even within the top 10. And whatever our counterterrorism presence in Somalia, focusing on that—but not on the financial and behavioral things the developed world does that exacerbates this crisis—ignores some of the most important underlying causes.

IS “NATIONAL SECURITY” A GOOD EXCUSE TO PURSUE POLICIES THAT UNDERMINE THE NATION-STATE?

Here I was steeling myself for a big rebuttal from Benjamin Wittes to my “Drone War on Westphalia” post on the implications of our use of drones. But all I got was a difference in emphasis.

In his response, Wittes generally agrees that our use of drones has implications for sovereignty. But he goes further—arguing it has implications for governance—and focuses particularly on the way technology—rather than the increasing importance of transnational entities I focused on—can undermine the nation-state by empowering non-state actors.

I agree emphatically with Wheeler’s focus on sovereignty here—although for reasons somewhat different from the ones she offers. Indeed, I think Wheeler doesn’t go quite far enough. For it isn’t just sovereignty at issue in the long run, it is governance itself. Robotics are one of several technological platforms that we can expect to greatly enhance the power of individuals and small groups relative to states. The more advanced of these technological areas are networked computers and biotechnology, but robotics is not all that far behind—a point Ken Anderson alludes to at [a post](#) over at the Volokh Conspiracy. Right

now, the United States is using robotics, as Wheeler points out, in situations that raises issues for other countries' sovereignty and governance and has a dominant technological advantage in the field. **But that's not going to continue. Eventually, other countries—and other groups, and other individuals—will use robotics in a fashion that has implications for American sovereignty, and, more generally, for the ability of governments in general to protect security.** [my emphasis]

Given DOD's complete inability to protect our computer toys from intrusion, I'll wager that time will come sooner rather than later. Iraqi insurgents already figured out how to compromise our drones once using off-the-shelf software.

Militants in Iraq have used \$26 off-the-shelf software to intercept live video feeds from U.S. Predator drones, potentially providing them with information they need to evade or monitor U.S. military operations. Senior defense and intelligence officials said Iranian-backed insurgents intercepted the video feeds by taking advantage of an unprotected communications link in some of the remotely flown planes' systems. Shiite fighters in Iraq used software programs such as SkyGrabber – available for as little as \$25.95 on the Internet – to regularly capture drone video feeds, according to a person familiar with reports on the matter.

It may not take long, then, for a country like Iran or an entity like a Mexican drug cartel to develop and disseminate a way to hack drones. And given the way other arms proliferate, it won't be long before drones are available on the private market. (Incidentally, remember how some of the crap intelligence used to trump up a war

against Saddam involved a balsa-wood drone?
Great times those were!)

So Wittes and I are in pretty close agreement here; he even agrees that the larger issue “ought to be the subject of wider and more serious public debate.”

But shouldn’t it be, then, part of the question whether facilitating this process serves national security or not?

In the interest of fostering some disagreement here—er, um, in an interest in furthering this discussion—I wanted to unpack the thought process in this passage from Wittes’ response to Spencer with what appears to be Wittes’ and my agreement in mind:

The point with merit is the idea that drones enable the waging of war without many of the attendant public costs—including the sort of public accounting that necessarily happens when you deploy large numbers of troops. I have no argument with him on this score, save that he seems to be looking at only one side of a coin that, in fact, has two sides. Ackerman sees that drones make it easy to get involved in wars. But he ignores the fact that for exactly the same reason, they make it easier to *limit involvement in wars*. How one feels about drones is partly conditioned by what one believes the null hypothesis to be. If one imagines that absent drones, our involvement in certain countries where we now use them would look more like law enforcement operations, one will tend to feel differently, I suspect, that if one thinks our involvement would look more like what happened in Iraq. Drones enable an ongoing, serious, military and intelligence involvement in countries without significant troop commitments.

As I read it, the logic of the passage goes like this:

1. Drones minimize the costs of involvement in wars
2. We will either be involved in these countries in a war or a law enforcement fashion
3. Therefore, we're better off using drones than large scale military operations

Now, before I get to the implications of this logic, let me point out a few things.

First, note how Wittes uses "what happened in Iraq" as the alternative kind of military deployment? As I said in my last post in this debate, I do think Iraq may end up being what we consider our last traditional nation-state war for some time, so I suppose it's a fair invocation of an alternative. But Iraq was also characterized, for years, by willfully insufficient planning, and it was an illegal war of choice in any case. If the only option is military intervention, why not compare drones with a more effectively-run more legitimate war, like the first Gulf War? Or why not admit the possibility of what we've got in Afghanistan, another incompetently executed war (largely because Bush moved onto Iraq before finishing Afghanistan) which now seems almost to serve as an incredibly expensive excuse to keep drones in the neighborhood.

Also, note the things Wittes doesn't consider among the possibilities here, such as diplomacy or non-involvement. We're not using drones (not yet, anyway) against Syria, Bahrain, or Ivory Coast, all of which share some similarities with Libya. So why—aside from the oil—should we assume we have to get involved in any case? Shouldn't we first consider using tools that don't create more failed states?

And even if we're going to be involved

militarily, there's the additional choice of using just special forces, which has the same kind of small footprint and low cost, but—up until the point you use them to kill Osama bin Laden—slightly different legal and strategic implications than drones (though ultimately someone is going to capture members of our special forces and treat them as unlawful enemy combatants).

Mind you, I'm not saying these alternative tools necessarily are the ones we should be using, but we ought to remember the choice isn't as simple as war versus law enforcement.

That said, Wittes is coming to this—and to the larger question of counterterrorism—from a perspective supporting significant (though not complete) use of a war framework. For those who do, doesn't that make the logic I laid out above—added to the seeming agreement that drones are one new development undermining the nation-state—look something like this (the additions are in bold)?

1. Drones minimize the costs of involvement in wars **but undermine nation-states**
2. We will either be involved in these countries in a war or a law enforcement fashion
3. **Given that binary choice, we favor a military involvement in these countries**
4. Therefore, we're better off using drones than large scale military operations
5. **A consequence of that choice will be popularizing a technology that will undermine nation-states, including our own**

Admittedly, I may be pushing the logic here, as well as the extent to which Wittes and I agree about the implications of drones. Nevertheless, this logic summarizes the reason we need more debate here—partly because we’re using tools without consent, partly because we’re not considering potential unintended consequences—particularly in the form of more failed states—of our choices. But also because, in the name of “national security,” we seem to be pursuing policies that will weaken our own nation-state. (Compare this with cyberwar, where, after we ratcheted up the strategy with Stuxnet, we are at least now—perhaps cynically—trying to establish an international regime to cover the new strategy.)

Now consider what’s happening at the same time, in the absence of a real debate about whether we need to launch drones against another country. We had 159 and 238 Americans die in tornadoes this year that were almost certainly an early example of the kinds of severe natural disasters we can expect from climate change; but we’re doing nothing as a country to prepare for more such events (including the historical flooding and its significant economic cost), much less to try to prevent climate change. We continue to let multinational banks guide our national policy choices, in spite of warnings that such an approach will bring about another crash. And no matter how relatively inexpensive drones are, we are spending billions on them, even while we’re firing the teachers that should be educating our next generation of engineers—eating our national security seed corn, if you will—because of budget woes.

In short, in a push to address one diminishing threat using the least costly military means, we may be hurting the viability of our nation-state. We’re fighting a transnational threat by empowering transnational threats. Meanwhile, the US is betraying its responsibility to provide its citizens security in the face of a number of much more urgent threats.

If the state is crumbling—and ours seems to be, literally, politically, and legally—then what becomes of the responsibility for national security? And how do you define the nation that national security must serve?

Update: Balsa for balsam fixed per Synoia.

CAN'T WE CALL THIS “COUNTER-TERRORISM PREPAREDNESS”?

Jared Bernstein (whose blog I still recommend) has responded to his 2-day PEPCO power outage by posting the crummy infrastructure report card the US got in 2009:

Check out the 2009 Report Card from the American Society of Civil Engineers: **Aviation D**

Bridges C

Dams D

Drinking Water D-

Energy D+

Hazardous Waste D

Inland Waterways D-

Levees D-

Public Parks and Recreation C-

Rail C-

Roads D-

Schools D

Solid Waste C+

Transit D

Wastewater D-

America's Infrastructure GPA: D

Estimated 5 Year Investment Need: \$2.2 Trillion

Bernstein's take (channeling Atrios) is that fixing all this infrastructure ought to be a good way to get 20 million people back to work.

But fixing just about every single one of these infrastructure problems is also a way to make our country more resilient to terrorism. Bridges? Dams? They make attractive terrorist targets, particularly if they're already crumbling. Drinking water? Another vulnerability to terrorist attacks. Rails? We know Osama bin Laden was reviewing plans to derail trains (as it crossed a bridge—this one's a twofer).

So can't we start fixing this stuff and, rather than calling it stimulus, call it "counter-terrorism preparedness"? There's no way, of course, the idiots in DC would support 2 trillion of stimulus, but their willingness to keep funding multiple wars in the name of terrorism—to the tune of trillions—show they might do so if we can give it a national security spin.

And between us? If we fixed things like levees and energy plants, we'd also be more resilient to things like earthquakes and climate change. Mind you, if Republicans found out about that, it'd be enough reason to defund it. So we'll just keep that part a secret between us.

REPUBLICANS WOULD

RATHER RED-STATERS DIE THAN PAY FOR EXTERNALITIES RELATED TO OIL

We're on our second near-record tornado this year and summer hasn't even started. Joplin, MO and Birmingham, AL have been especially hard hit, but much of flyover country is set to spend the summer hunkering down to hide from truly horrifying weather.

Yet Eric Cantor wants to hold disaster relief hostage to debt hysteria. (h/t Steve Benen)

The No. 2 House Republican said that if Congress doles out additional money to assist in the aftermath of natural disasters across the country, the spending may need to be offset.

House Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-Va.) said "if there is support for a supplemental, it would be accompanied by support for having pay-fors to that supplemental."

The stance is all the more heartless given that most rational people believe there's a tie between the increasingly volatile weather and climate change. That is, it's not just that Eric Cantor wants to deprive fly-over country of any government assistance in the face of freak natural disaster, he's demanding that communities suffering the consequences of climate change also pay the bill to clean up after climate change-caused disaster. He's asking already-devastated communities to pay for our collective addiction to oil (and coal).

One obvious solution might be to impose a carbon tax at least big enough to pay for such disasters, which are likely to become more and more common.

But these same Republicans that want Joplin to pay the price of getting flattened by tornadoes are also heading in the wrong direction. They want debt reduction, they claim. But they also refuse to cut subsidies to the same carbon industry contributing so much to climate change.

We have enough money, apparently, to keep paying off the most profitable corporations in the world. But not enough to help our neighbors who pay the physical, emotional, and economic price for those corporations' profits.

A SPUTNIK MOMENT WITHOUT THE MOON

✖ I laughed yesterday when I first saw the SOTU excerpts with Obama's description of a Sputnik moment. Mind you, he had already used—or rather, cribbed—the language before. So the language itself wasn't funny.

Rather, it was that he planned to use it as an urgent call to action on the day that Carol Browner announced her resignation. The only way calling this a Sputnik moment makes sense, IMO, is if you can paint in very concrete terms the security threat that demands such urgency. And the urgent threat facing us—one badly exacerbated because of the particular industries where China is kicking our ass—is climate change. But with Browner's departure also goes Obama's focus on climate change, replaced instead by a vaguely defined clean energy race.

As David Roberts lays out,

[C]onsider the larger analogy at the heart of Obama's speech: America is at a "Sputnik moment." Well, why was Sputnik a Sputnik moment? Not because Americans said, "Wow, the USSR is getting really good at technology! We're getting

outcompeted!" No, what the public said was, "Holy sh*t! Our mortal enemy is putting stuff in *space*! They're going to rain rockets down on us and we're all going to die!" In other words, Sputnik was not some friendly challenge to see who can win the race to the future (or whatever). It was a *threat*. That's what lit a fire under America's ass and that's why America rose to the challenge. Obama wants to launch a clean energy race. And good for him. But what are the stakes? What is the threat? Where is the *urgency*? If it's just about international competition, why not focus on good macroeconomic policy – why go to such lengths to build up *this* economic sector, *these* technologies? Why not just leave it to the market?

Here's why: **The U.S. needs to get at or close to zero carbon emissions by the middle of this century or there will be severe and possibly irreversible changes in the climate, leading to massive, widespread human suffering.** That's why we don't have time to wait for the invisible hand of the market. That's why we need massive investments, tighter regulations, and a price on climate pollution. *That's the threat.* Without it, a push for clean energy is a nice slogan that can easily be shunted aside when, oh, gas prices are rising, or there's a recession, or Joe Manchin need to get reelected.

The threat of climate change is what justifies and animates the clean energy race. That's the substantive need. [DR's emphasis]

A Sputnik moment only works if you've laid out a compelling threat that demands the country work together to solve it. We **are** facing such a moment. But Obama won't even name that threat by name.

REDEFINING SECURITY

Joe Biden finally endorsed yesterday what the imperialists in DC have long been backing: an open-ended presence in Afghanistan.

“It is not our intention to govern or to nation-build,” Mr Biden said. “As President Karzai often points out, this is the responsibility of the Afghan people, and they are fully capable of it.”

But he stressed that the United States would continue to assist the Afghan government.

“If the Afghan people want it, we won’t leave in 2014,” Mr Biden said.

Meanwhile, Lester Brown uses the last paragraph of a piece on the coming food riots to point out how out-dated our empire—the decision-making that will lead us to stay in Afghanistan until we go broke—is.

As the new year begins, the price of wheat is setting an all-time high in the United Kingdom. Food riots are spreading across Algeria. Russia is importing grain to sustain its cattle herds until spring grazing begins. India is wrestling with an 18-percent annual food inflation rate, sparking protests. China is looking abroad for potentially massive quantities of wheat and corn. The Mexican government is buying corn futures to avoid unmanageable tortilla price rises. And on January 5, the U.N. Food and Agricultural organization announced that its food price index for December hit an all-time high.

But whereas in years past, it’s been

weather that has caused a spike in commodities prices, now it's trends on both sides of the food supply/demand equation that are driving up prices. On the demand side, the culprits are population growth, rising affluence, and the use of grain to fuel cars. On the supply side: soil erosion, aquifer depletion, the loss of cropland to nonfarm uses, the diversion of irrigation water to cities, the plateauing of crop yields in agriculturally advanced countries, and – due to climate change – crop-withering heat waves and melting mountain glaciers and ice sheets. These climate-related trends seem destined to take a far greater toll in the future.

[snip]

The unrest of these past few weeks is just the beginning. **It is no longer conflict between heavily armed superpowers, but rather spreading food shortages and rising food prices – and the political turmoil this would lead to – that threatens our global future. Unless governments quickly redefine security and shift expenditures from military uses to investing in climate change mitigation,** water efficiency, soil conservation, and population stabilization, the world will in all likelihood be facing a future with both more climate instability and food price volatility. If business as usual continues, food prices will only trend upward.

Note, I think Brown misses one cause of the food shortages: the treatment of food and commodities used in its production as one more thing our bankers can bet on at their casino.

But his point stands: probably the two biggest threats to our country are—first—climate change

and—second—the refusal to fix the global economy the banksters broke. Yet we’re continuing to pour our dollars into Afghanistan, and to pour it into efforts that may well just exacerbate the violence.

A McClatchy story written by Medill graduate students shows how badly our own “security” establishment responds to such non-military threats.

Yet the U.S. government is ill-prepared to act on climate changes that are coming faster than anticipated and threaten to bring instability to places of U.S. national interest, interviews with several dozen current and former officials and outside experts and a review of two decades’ worth of government reports indicate.

Climate projections lack crucial detail, they say, and information about how people react to changes – for instance, by migrating – is sparse. Military officials say they don’t yet have the intelligence they need in order to prepare for what might come.

Rolf Mowatt-Larssen, a 23-year veteran of the CIA who led the Department of Energy’s intelligence unit from 2005 to 2008, said **the intelligence community simply wasn’t set up to deal with a problem such as climate change that wasn’t about stealing secrets.**

[snip]

In 2007, Department of Energy intelligence chief Mowatt-Larssen built an experimental program called Global Energy & Environment Strategic Ecosystem, or Global EESE. He tapped Carol Dumaine, a CIA foresight strategist known around the agency as a creative visionary, to lead the program.

“Our modern intelligence evolved for a

different type of threat: monolithic, top-down, incrementally changing,”

Dumaine, who has since returned to the CIA, said in a recent interview. She, on the other hand, was “trying to grow a garden of intelligence genius.”

The program brought together more than 200 of the brightest minds from around the world to explore the impact of issues such as abrupt climate change, energy infrastructure and environmental stresses in Afghanistan.

But after only two years, the program was shuttered. Former members say it was brought down by bureaucratic infighting, **political pressure from Congress and the Bush White House, and concerns about including foreign nationals in the intelligence arena.**

“The most important thing we lost is data. We lost the data that accompanies new ways of conducting intelligence and for getting it right with environmental problems,” Mowatt-Larssen said. [my emphasis]

We can't prepare for issues that involve science that has been attacked by a well-funded lobby; we can't prepare for issues that require open sharing with foreign nationals; we can't prepare for events that don't involve stealing secrets; we can't protect national security programs that don't fit Republicans' narrowly defined understanding of it; we can't prepare for problems not caused by nation-states.

And one thing this article doesn't say is that if can't prepare to deal with the changes climate change will bring, we sure as hell can't prevent or mitigate its effects.

The US empire is in decline on many levels. Its time of economic hegemony is passing; its too-big military is not designed to fight the threats against our country; its government has

been rendered dysfunctional by corporate money.

But one of the biggest problems with the US empire is that it chose not to—or was unable to—use its twilight period to prepare for the challenges ahead.

DEBBIE STABENOW TO CHAIR AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE

✖ Finally, some good news coming out of November's election.

Debbie Stabenow has been selected to replace the outgoing Blanche Lincoln as Chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee. (There had been some concern that Big Ag would oppose someone like Stabenow and instead push Kent Conrad to take the position.)

As I've explained before, this means that a Senator from a state with diverse, smaller-scale agriculture will take over and preside over 2012's Agriculture Bill. Hopefully, this will present an opportunity to refocus our Ag policy on smaller scale, more healthy agriculture.

She's got some statements from leaders of MI's Ag community posted; they describe some of her past focus on specialty crops, food safety, and research.

"Senator Stabenow and her staff worked very hard on the 2008 farm bill to make sure there were new provisions that are specific to specialty crop farmers in Michigan and throughout the United States. She has been a champion for food safety programs, conservation, energy and research. We need an elected official like Senator Stabenow who is

interested in Michigan agriculture, and working to grow and expand the economic engine in the state that creates jobs and keeps our food supply safe.” – Phillip J. Korson II, President of The Cherry Marketing Institute.

[snip]

“Sen. Debbie Stabenow has been a friend of agriculture and farms, large and small, serving the Michigan State House, U.S. House, and U.S. Senate Agriculture Committees and been an advocate for strong Michigan food systems. She really listens to farmers, both commodity crop and specialty crop growers, regarding their concerns about federal policy.” – Elaine Brown, Executive Director of the Michigan Food and Farming Systems.

“We are very appreciative of Senator Stabenow’s tireless efforts in support of the International Food Protection Training Institute’s mission to improve food safety nationwide. As Chairwoman, we expect that Senator Stabenow will continue to build on her strong track record in agriculture and food safety.” – Gerald Wojtala, Executive Director of the International Food Protection Training Institute.

“Senator Stabenow filled a leading role in the writing and passage of the 2008 Farm Bill. Senator Stabenow authored the first ever Specialty Crops title, which recognized the importance of these crops to our country’s agriculture. She also helped in many other provisions of the bill, particularly support for agricultural research and conservation programs.”- Dave Smith, Executive Director of the Michigan Vegetable Council.

Congratulations Senator Stabenow.

DEBBIE STABENOW V. BEN NELSON; CHERRY ORCHARDS V. CON AGRA

✖ This could be an interesting, beneficial outcome of this year's election: Debbie Stabenow ascending to Chair the Agriculture Committee.

As of his last calculation, Nate Silver gives the Democrats an 84% chance of keeping the Senate. But they'll keep it without Blanche Lincoln, whom Nate gives a 100% chance of losing to John Boozman. And that'll open up the Chairmanship on Ag.

The Politico reports that, in spite of the fact that four people have more seniority on the committee, Stabenow stands a decent chance of getting the post, though Bad Nelson might demand it as his reward for staying in the caucus.

Michigan's Debbie Stabenow is seen as the front-runner to replace Lincoln, but that's not a given. Nebraska moderate Ben Nelson might win the post as a consolation prize for staying in the Democratic Party, or Kent Conrad of North Dakota could abandon his budget chairmanship to take the helm.

[snip]

"Everybody in town seems to think that she is most likely going to be the next chairman," said one lobbyist who tracks the committee.

Sources close to the panel say the Michigan Democrat is well-liked by her colleagues and earned their respect during the last round of farm bill negotiations by bridging the interests

of states with commodity crops and those with specialty fruit and vegetables.

But because Michigan isn't your typical Big Ag state, some observers say Stabenow might face opposition from powerful industry lobbies. "There would probably be fear among some of the industry leaders of the cotton people and the wheat people and the barley people if they saw Stabenow take the helm," said an industry source close to the committee.

Now, Stabenow isn't always the most hardnosed leader. And on occasions (notably, the bankruptcy bill) she has put corporate interests ahead of her constituents.

But as the Politico article suggests, she would make a very interesting Ag Chair because of the nature of our Ag industry in MI. That's because MI's Ag industry has a diversity second only to CA, but (because of the scale) much less dominated by big players. Here's a snapshot:

- Michigan is the national leader in the production of tart cherries, having grown 196 million pounds or 77% of the U.S. total in 2007.
- Michigan also ranks first nationally for the production of pickling cucumbers, geraniums, petunias, squash and vegetable-type bedding plants.
- Michigan ranks 3rd in the nation in apple production with over 770 million bushels produced in 2007.

The estimated farm-level value was \$97.1 million.

- Michigan is 2nd nationally for beans, carrots, celery, plums and 3rd in asparagus production.
- Over 887,560 tons of fresh market and processing vegetables were grown in Michigan in 2007. The state ranks 8th in fresh market and 5th in processed vegetable production nationally.
- Michigan ranks 3rd nationally in value of wholesale sales of floriculture products.
- In 2007, Michigan led the nation in the value of sales for 13 crops, including: Potted Easter Lilies, Potted Spring Flowering Bulbs, Potted Geraniums (seed), Potted Petunias, Potted New Guinea Impatiens, New Guinea Impatiens Hanging Baskets, Geraniums, Impatiens, Begonia and Petunia Hanging Baskets, Impatiens and New Guinea Impatiens (flats) and Potted Geraniums (cuttings).
- About 335,000 dairy cows produced 7,598 million pounds of milk in 2007. Michigan ranks 7th nationally for milk

production

- Michigan's hog production totaled 556 million pounds in 2007. Michigan ranks fourteenth in the nation in terms of inventory.
- There were over 1 million head of cattle in the state in 2007 with an estimated value of \$1.42 billion.

(Somehow, that list neglected to mention blueberries, where we also lead the nation). MI farms are, on average, smaller than the national average, though they are more profitable per acre. There's a very healthy farmers market culture here, and also some proactive efforts to develop locally-branded processed food from our harvest, such as the soy processing plant 10 miles from here that offers a non-GMO soy oil. Our local big grocery chains do a pretty good job of promoting locally produced products.

And then there's Tony the Tiger, which is about as Big Ag culture as we get.

In other words, if Stabenow gets the Chair it'll put someone who is not beholden to Big Ag the way the Ag Chairmen typically are. At a time when the local Ag movement is picking up steam, we might have someone whose constituency would support such an effort.

Compare that with the most likely alternative: Ben Nelson. Who represents, among other corporations, Con Agra. As big as Big Ag gets.

Mind you, the decision may be made by the margin with which the Democrats keep the Senate. If we keep it by just two votes, I imagine we'll see Con Agra continue to rule. But if we can eke out a few more seats, it'll give Bad Nelson much less leverage to demand this Chairmanship.

(Cherry Orchard image by jsorbieus)

THE WISHING WELL: IS MACONDO THE MOUTH OF HELL SILENCED?

For the first time since Macondo, the Mouth Of Hell, first blew out in a fiery explosion on April 20, killing eleven men in the process, BP seems to have the well under control and there appears to be no hydrocarbons leaking into the waters of the Gulf of Mexico.