

## Time for Civic Self-Determination

Written by Kathleen McCarthy  
Thursday, 18 August 2011 05:26

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One dictionary defines “incompetent” as “inadequate to or unsuitable for a particular purpose” and “lacking the qualities needed for effective action.” I’d say this perfectly describes the political spectrum currently tasked with the leadership of America. Let’s throw the mainstream media in with this bunch for good measure.

Most Americans are grossly uninformed. Between the federally controlled curriculum of public education and the woeful malfeasance of the dominating media, corrupt politicians, agency bureaucrats, industry leaders, union bosses, and foundation heads all get a free pass.

Where is the outrage that should accompany the serious breaches of public trust? Exactly what will it take to convince you it is time to take an active role in your city, county, state, and country? Pick one and get involved. You might find you actually enjoy it; working to make a difference is rejuvenating.

Documentaries such as *GasLand*, *The Crumbling of America*, *What in the World Are They Spraying?* (see *River Cities’ Reader* Issue 777, April 28, 2011 ), and *Inside Job* (see *River Cities’ Reader* Issue 775, March 31, 2011) present need-to-know information about the status of our nation’s resources, whether natural, man-made (infrastructure), or financial. It is critical to understand how precarious the bigger picture is, meaning the problems that need solving – but that have no

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chance of being resolved by the current leadership.

The elephant in the room only cursorily examined in these documentaries is the appalling failure by the government agencies that were established for the express purpose of managing these very things but have squandered billions of tax dollars pretending to do their jobs. Whether through corruption or mismanagement, the result is the same – deterioration of national assets that will demand a massive reallocation of tax dollars to correct.

*GasLand* demonstrated the terrible contamination of watersheds, creeks, and residential wells – not to mention the air and soil – where hundreds of thousands of drills are located across the American West, including Utah, Wyoming, Colorado, and Texas.

In the 1940s, Haliburton established fracking as a means of extracting natural gas from shale reserves deep underground, but the technique was largely dismissed as cost-prohibitive. That all changed in the 1990s, when Haliburton – of which Dick Cheney was CEO before becoming vice president – enhanced the technology by adding chemical mixtures to the process of fracking.

Fracking – short for hydraulic fracturing – refers to pressurized liquid (made from a mixture of 596 toxic chemicals, including known carcinogens) that are pumped into the earth to fracture rock and release natural gas for extraction and sale.

Thousands of drill sites sprang up, especially in the West after Vice President Cheney convinced the Bureau of Land Management to donate public land for natural-gas drilling. Yet even with the proliferation of drill sites and millions of tons of chemically infused water injections into the earth, there has been no study of the environmental impact. We have energy and environmental-protection agencies specifically charged with oversight of this industry and its practices – each receiving billions in tax dollars each year – ignoring fracking and its consequences.

In fact, time after time, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) denied problems, dismissed investigations, and had a widespread policy of ignoring any issues related to fracking. In other words, regulators turned a blind eye, becoming complicit in the environmental crime.

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The Energy Policy Act of 2005, spearheaded by Cheney, *exclusively exempted* oil- and gas-drilling companies from nearly all relevant regulation, including the Clean Water Act, the Safe Drinking Water Act, the Clean Air Act, and the Superfund act. This included exempting the companies from reporting requirements to disclose the chemicals used in the fracking process, claiming the mixtures were “trade secrets.” This essentially prevented lawsuits against these companies because litigants could not prove the chemicals were causing harm! It also officially excused the EPA from monitoring the activity.

One event perfectly illustrates the collusion between government, big business, and the media. In 2009, when New York was targeted for natural-gas drilling, thousands of residents attended public hearings to object. Not a single member of the state or federal environmental-protection agency attended, and when press conferences were held by activists, no press showed up!

Meanwhile, the Fracturing Responsibility & Awareness of Chemicals Act of 2009 (FRAC Act), which would close the loopholes in the Energy Policy Act of 2005 and force disclosure through regulation under the Safe Drinking Water Act, failed in committee. It was reintroduced in March 2011 but again to no avail.

There appears to be no good argument for not approving the FRAC Act. Gas drillers claim it will add \$100,000 to the cost of each new well, but that’s a drop in the bucket for a highly profitable, oligopolistic industry. Neither side of the aisle has made any serious attempt to rein this in on any level.

*The Crumbling of America*, recently aired on the History Channel, presents a frightening overview of the peril that exists after decades of neglect of America’s infrastructure, including dams and levees; sewer systems and aqueducts; pipelines; roads, bridges, and tunnels; rail systems; airports and sea ports; and the electricity grid. The neglect has been by both private and public owners, as well as regulators.

This infrastructure catapulted America into the most prosperous, modernized country on Earth. We were unparalleled among nations for our ingenuity and productivity. Now we are sliding at an equally unprecedented rate into dilapidation as our infrastructure is burdened beyond its capacities.

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The American Society of Civil Engineers did an exhaustive evaluation of the nation's infrastructure, giving it an overall score of D, just short of failing. It estimates the cost of repair and renovation at \$1.7 trillion.

There are approximately 75,000 dams in America, many of which have been identified as hazards to life and property if not repaired. In Iowa alone, we have 3,800 dams; 31 are considered hazardous, with six on the high hazard list. These include dams in Burlington, Cedar Falls, Montezuma, Winterset, Polk County, and Fort Des Moines Park. The Lake Delhi dam failed in July 2010 but was not on the list of 31 potential failures. There are only two state inspectors for 3,800 dams because of funding cuts, covering little more than 200 dam inspections per year. It is unreasonable to expect good stewardship of our infrastructure with such minimal support.

This is just one example of a systemic lack of judgment, by both state and federal legislators and regulators, in setting spending priorities. Meanwhile, we are building/funding brand-new, state-of-the-art electricity grids in Iraq and Afghanistan, not to mention the largest embassy in the world in Iraq. The amount of infrastructure spending on foreign soil is staggering, especially considering our dire domestic infrastructure needs.

Sewer systems in most medium to large American cities are antiquated and literally poisoning waterways and aquifers with impunity. The electric infrastructure is largely outdated and ramshackle, especially in larger metropolitan areas. Bridge construction has a typical life of 50 years but is being rigged rather than replaced. And this is just the tip of the iceberg.

Another looming threat to infrastructure presented in the film is the controversial climate change. No longer being promoted as "global warming" because science cannot prove the theory that human carbon-dioxide emissions are the cause, "climate change" is the new mantra said to be occurring as part of the natural cycle of planetary life.

Regardless, central banks and global financiers have proceeded with the implementation of a new commodity market – trading carbon credits – under the guise of reducing climate change by less than one half of a degree in 25 years. It is the next financial mega-scam of daunting proportion. "Smart growth," "smart meters," "sustainable development," and "hazard mitigation" are all buzz words for the United Nation's Agenda 21 that dovetails effectively into the

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carbon-credit marketplace by providing a huge new financial infrastructure of permanent funding in the form of indirect taxation on energy usage.

Implementation and enforcement of this new financial infrastructure will mostly come through local government adopting federal programs. Getting involved locally with your county board and city council is the path to civic self-determination, and provides individual communities the opportunity to accept, reject, or perhaps even nullify ill-conceived public policies.