

Change.

Year in Review 2006



DRUM
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INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC
POLICY

DMI YEAR IN REVIEW

A Breaki

This was the year of Systems Failure. Most Americans were tired of the status quo—on the war, on the economy, on the lapsed ethics of those entrusted to represent our interests. The result: on Election Day, they rebooted, ready to try again.

It's no wonder. In 2006, our nation's leadership failed to deliver time and time again on what was asked of it. Congress began an earnest debate on immigration reform, but ended up with nothing more than a plan to build an expensive fence. The House of Representatives knew our nation needed an increase in the minimum wage, but then cynically tied it to a repeal of the Estate Tax, in essence a tax cut for our nation's wealthiest. The White House rolled out a plan to make health care affordable and reliable for seniors, but left these seniors vulnerable to paying out of pocket when they failed to address the skyrocketing costs of prescription drugs. Across the board, the problems impacting Americans went without address on the federal level.

To make matters worse, as Americans struggled they were told that all was fine. "Our Economy is Strong" said the President over and over again. Americans needed to look no further than their paychecks spread thin by stagnant wages, their outstanding credit card balances as more and more families go into debt just to cover the basic costs of living, and their skyrocketing insurance premiums to know the truth. But while it was the worst of times for many, it was the best of time for some. Our nation's wealthiest citizens continued to grow wealthier thanks to federal public policy promoting it.

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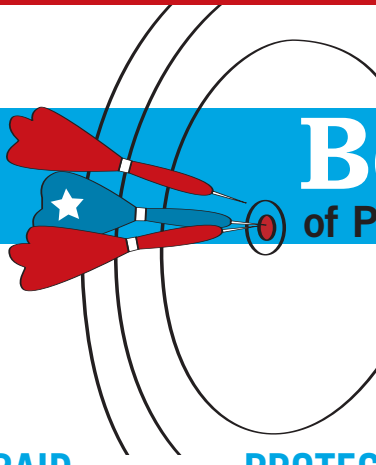
ng Point.

At least on the state level, policymakers got to work. Illinois greatly expanded access to pre-school programs. Vermont enacted a plan to make health care more affordable that not only outshines the Massachusetts “individual mandate,” but puts the rest of the nation to shame. The Wisconsin state legislature passed a law that reduces greenhouse gas emissions while lowering energy costs and creating new jobs.

Americans voiced their frustrations with often unjust policies in new ways in 2006. Take, for example, the groundswell of online activism. Blogs provided the medium for regular citizens to weigh in. People organized using the Internet for living wage campaigns and congressional ethics reform. And new technology enabled regular people to hold their elected officials accountable.

While conservatives continue to shell out time and money in service of shrinking government, Americans are ready for a government that does more than fail to act or pass the buck. Those who look to government to do what we desperately need it to do—raise the minimum wage and make prescription drugs more affordable, for starters—are waiting with baited breath to see if the incoming congressional majority will deliver on the policies it has promised.

In this Year in Review, the Drum Major Institute for Public Policy offers: a look back at the best and worst in public policy this year, an update from the states and from the blogosphere, a 2006 required reading list for progressives, interviews with eight people shaping progressive public policy, the quotes to remember from 2006, a hawk’s eye view of what the think tanks on the conservative Right are up to and, as always, the 2006 Injustice Index.



Best & Worst of Public Policy 2006

best ↘

REVERSE THE RAID ON STUDENT AID

A college education is your ticket to making it in the global economy. Or so says the White House. So how come they haven't done a thing about its skyrocketing price tag? Take college loans. Thanks to high interest rates, a bachelor's degree is much more expensive for low-income students who take out loans than for affluent students who can pay up front. Congressman George Miller and Senator Dick Durbin introduced the Reverse the Raid on Student Aid Act to curb this trend. The Act would cut interest rates in half for students receiving federally subsidized loans. While the legislation didn't pass, it drew much needed attention to the many young people who are stuck paying back high-interest rate loans in exchange for their degrees. For its insistence that college remain a financially viable option, the Reverse the Raid on Student Aid Act wins the title "Best of."

FIGHTING FOR A NEUTRAL NET

There's a reason that www.drummajorinstitute.org has the same ability to be seen by someone browsing the Internet as Fox News Online. The Internet is a democratic platform on which all sites load equally quickly, and well. That is, until large telecommunications companies like AT&T, Verizon and Comcast saw an opportunity to increase their profits by overriding the neutrality of the net and creating a virtual express lane so that sites of high-paying customers are seen with ease. But, persuaded by the netroots, advocacy organizations and the non-profits and small businesses they represented, as well as the large corporations like search engines who make money off of regular people having easy access to the web, Senators Olympia Snowe (R-ME) and Byron Dorgan (D-ND) introduced the "Internet Freedom Preservation Act of 2006," an amendment to the Telecom Act that would prohibit Internet providers from favoring some sites over others. While the amendment failed, the effort successfully stalled legislation backed by the corporate lobby. For this reason, it is one of the year's "best."

PROTECTING ACCESS TO THE POLLS

Named for three heroines of the Civil Rights movement, The Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks, and Coretta Scott King Voting Rights Act was reauthorized this year to secure access to the polls for the most vulnerable voters. But it didn't pass without significant debate. At issue were three important pieces of the VRA that were set to sunset in 2007: two require extra protections for voters in voting districts with a history of discrimination, and one, most controversially, mandates that ballots and services be available in multiple languages. Some in Congress fought against the last provision as a way to draw attention to the English-only movement. Thankfully, the majority of representatives were more concerned with preserving the enfranchisement of thousands of citizens still in the process of learning English. For protecting access to the polls for all U.S. citizens, and therefore protecting our democracy, reauthorization of this act gets a place in the "Best of 2006."

REPLACING HUNGER WITH HEALTH

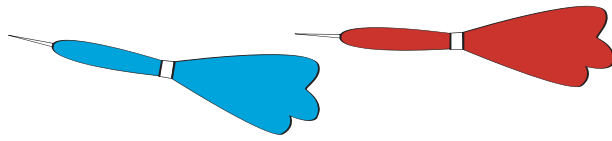
In the wealthiest city in the world, an estimated 1.2 million New Yorkers—including more than 400,000 children—go hungry or live in homes with no guarantee of a next meal. It's completely unacceptable then that just under half of these families go without needed food stamps because city infrastructure has historically fallen short of getting these services to those who need them, leaving millions of federal aid dollars unspent. In 2006, the City Council took action with a plan that goes beyond the important and immediate task of quelling starvation to focus on improving the health of New Yorkers. The bill allows farmers' markets to accept food stamps, funds programs to combat obesity, and expands the free school breakfast plan to include all those who apply, regardless of income bracket. For its emphasis on fighting hunger through health, the Food Today, Healthy Tomorrow campaign merits a spot in the "Best of."

SHIELDING TROOPS FROM PREDATORY LENDING

According to the Department of Defense, soldiers and their families are facing a threat to their military readiness that no one would have predicted: debt. America's soldiers are increasingly targeted by predatory lenders who use high-pressure sales tactics to force them into borrowing agreements with impossible-to-pay-off interest rates. And this is just one example of a whole range of dishonest and unscrupulous financial services targeted at soldiers and their families. So the Senate decided to take action and end the financial injustice. By approving the Military Personnel Financial Services Protection Act, the Senate capped outrageously high interest rates on pay-day loans and put a stop to the military-only mutual funds whose ridiculous service charges ate away at soldiers' contributions. For its commitment to protecting the financially vulnerable from dirty deals, this legislation deserves a space on the "Best of" list.

CLOSING THE DONUT HOLE

Medicare Part D, the controversial prescription drug plan, has met with mixed success in its first year of implementation. While some seniors enjoy affordable coverage, others are confused by the many complicated private plans to choose from, each of which negotiates separately with prescription drug companies and thus offers the same drugs at different prices. Unequal and often overly expensive prescription prices are a problem because Part D's plans all come with a "donut hole"—or a gap that kicks in after a certain amount in drug spending and leaves seniors without coverage until they spend almost \$3000 in out-of-pocket medical expenses. Aiming to keep seniors out of the donut hole, the new House leadership has promised that, in the first 100 hours of the new legislative session, it will pass a bill allowing the Department of Health and Human Services to use its purchasing power to negotiate lower bulk prices directly with drug companies, resulting in the same lower prices for the same drugs, regardless of plan. For working for equally affordable medications for all seniors, this proposal earns the title "Best of."



↙ worst

TRIFECTA OF DIRTY TRICKS

What do you call a bill that combines a cut in the Estate Tax with a modest increase in the minimum wage with anti-labor loopholes with an extension of pro-business tax breaks? If you're outgoing Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, you'd call it your pet project. If you are the rest of America, you'd call it an all-out insult. In one of the biggest acts of political cynicism to show its face in 2006, Frist pledged support for a much-needed increase in the minimum wage... as long as it came with a substantial tax break for the wealthiest one-tenth of one percent of Americans that will cost the government \$1 trillion and other changes that would actually result in a pay cut for some workers. Lucky for current and aspiring middle-class Americans, who need both a minimum wage increase and the paved highways and cops and teachers paid for with revenue from the Estate Tax, the Trifecta Bill was taken off the table in August. This one merits the title "Worst of," three times over.

ZEROES FOR GROUND ZERO HEROES

Five years after the World Trade Center attacks, almost 70% of Ground Zero first responders and workers have become sick. And yet, New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg has consistently denied a link between exposure to Ground Zero and these illnesses. In fact, the Mayor made it his official policy to oppose legislation passed in the New York State legislature in August that gave sick first responders and cleanup workers adequate time to file claims for lost wages and medical bills and increased death and pension benefits for public employees. The reason for the Mayor's opposition? Mayor Bloomberg felt that compensating these heroes for their 9/11 related injuries would simply cost the city "too much." One wonders what would have happened in the aftermath of 9/11 had these workers made the same type of calculation. For favoring its own financial interests over the health of our nation's heroes, the City's official policy of opposing New York State's recent workers' compensation legislation deserves to be called one of the "worst."

PICKET THE FENCE

Proponents of immigration reform and anti-immigrant activists agree: the immigration policy we've got isn't working. So it's a shame that Congress spent this election year doing political posturing instead of actually fixing the system. Exhibit A: The Fence. Tacked onto annual appropriations legislation this year was a bill that authorized \$21.3 billion in taxpayer dollars to build a fence-industrial complex along the Mexican border, replete with vehicle barriers and a so-called virtual fence. Securing the border is an important goal, but the immigrants from Mexico don't come here because it's easy. They are willing to risk their lives to attain economic opportunity—opportunity available because the American economy needs their labor. Congress should pass a real policy that addresses the critical role immigrants play in our economy—including the 12 million here illegally—while protecting American workers against a race to the bottom. Instead, it built a fence. And for that, this law is one of 2006's "Worst of."

BLAMING BABIES

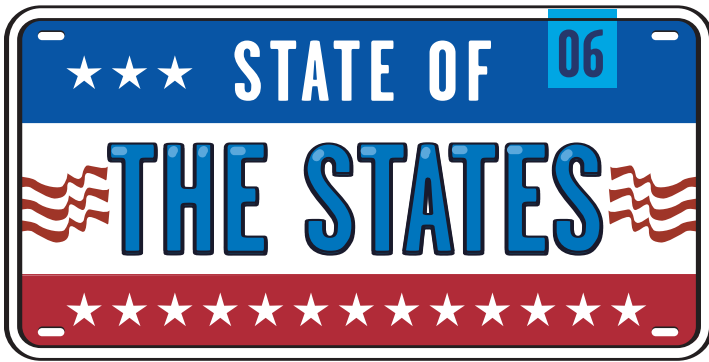
Approximately four million babies are born in the United States each year. The cost of one-third of these deliveries is covered by Medicaid because the mothers are low-income and uninsured. Up until this July, any baby born to a mother whose delivery was paid for by Medicaid was automatically covered under the program for a year. Not any more. The Bush administration announced that parents must now file an application and present proof of citizenship for coverage of their children to kick in. Their reason? A controversial interpretation of the Deficit Reduction Act. Doctors and immigrant activists have protested, arguing that this policy is legally unnecessary, that too many infants will go without coverage in the weeks while birth certificates and Medicaid applications are being processed, and that some families won't file the applications out of fear of deportation. Opponents of the policy claim it is driven more by anti-immigrant sentiment than sound fiscal or health care policy. California has flat out objected, saying that any baby born in the U.S. is a citizen and should not need to prove it. That's enough proof to add it to our "Worst of" list.

PROMOTIONS WITHOUT PERKS

To avoid a health care crisis, the Bureau of Labor Statistics claims that by 2014, 29.4% more new nursing jobs that will need to be filled. But when too few people are willing to enter the profession in the coming years, we'll know where to place blame. In October, the National Labor Relations Board decreed that registered nurses—and many other workers—will be barred from union membership if they have minimal supervisory duties. While labor policy has long held that there are only two categories of workers, labor and management, this ruling creates a third: supervisors, who continue to do the same work as before, but, like management, are barred from joining a union. Without the right to join a union—which translates into higher pay, protections against the verbal abuse suffered by more than 70% of nurses on the job, and more control over workplace conditions—we can bet that the already high job dissatisfaction rate among nurses will only increase. This short sighted anti-labor decision deserves a spot among the "Worst of."

WELFARE WOES

The best way for women on welfare to permanently move out of poverty is to attain a college degree. So why does a government supposedly interested in reducing poverty cut away at access to education? As part of a larger revamping of the welfare system in July, the Department of Health and Human Services handed down a new, nationally uniform definition of the work that welfare recipients must perform in order to receive benefits. Instead of counting enough education hours to actually make pursuing a college degree a feasible option for people on welfare (as some states used to do under the old welfare system), the new regulations count mostly make-work tasks. These federal rules will only make it harder for a single mother working 35 hours a week in a workfare assignment and raising a family at an income 50% below the poverty level to find time and energy to attend classes at night and actually work her way out of poverty. This policy, which should be listed under "counterproductive" in the dictionary, also merits a place as one of this year's "worst."



In 2006, state governments stepped in where the federal government has refused to act. They passed legislation to address global warming and create renewable energy sources, make health insurance affordable, expand universal pre-kindergarten programs, rectify inequitable tax burdens, and more.

In that way, state governments can often serve as bastions of progressive policymaking. People expect their local legislators to create policy that will directly improve the quality of their lives, not get bogged down in battles over ideology.

Through the following State of the States, produced with our partner Progressive States, whose mission is to pass progressive legislation in all fifty states by providing coordinated research and strategic advocacy tools to forward-thinking state legislators, we highlight a few places where innovative policies are becoming law. But don't be fooled. When it comes to getting all state governments on the same progressive page, we still have a long way to go.



★ MASSACHUSETTS

WARRIORS FOR THE MINIMUM WAGE

The dangerous depreciation of the minimum wage in recent years has left many longing for the good ol' days. In 1968, the federal minimum wage, adjusted for inflation, was \$9.16 an hour. In 2006, it was \$5.15 an hour—not enough for a family to stave off poverty.

It's hard to believe that the federal government has yet to intervene, but it's true. State governments that want to care for their workers have had no choice but to take matters into their own hands.

And they did. In 2006, Massachusetts leapfrogged other states by passing a law that will raise its state minimum wage to \$8 per hour by 2008. California followed with a similar \$8 per hour increase to begin in 2008.

Unfortunately, neither state indexed their minimum wage to inflation, which means that increases in the cost of living will steadily erode the value of the minimum wage year by year unless legislatures raise the rate. Early versions of legislation passed by the Massachusetts Senate and by the California Legislature included indexing, but opposition from Republican governors in both states led to their defeat.

Washington State—the leader on the minimum wage before 2006—remains the reigning champion. Its government enacted indexing back in 2001, and in 2006 its rate was \$7.63 an hour.

With a new Congress promising a federal increase in the minimum wage, and six states passing such increases by Proposition in the midterm elections, it looks like the country is finally back to the future.

★ ILLINOIS

BALANCING WORK AND FAMILY

It's a rare breed, that public policy Promised Land. But imagine a single reform that delivers expanded economic growth, helps working parents balance work and family demands, and increases educational equity between rich and poor families. Illinois did just that, and came up the first law in the nation that establishes the goal of universally-available public pre-school for all 3- and 4-year olds.

“Pre-school for All reflects the science that demonstrates success in education is dependent on what happens during children's earliest years,” said Jerry Stermer, President of Voices for Illinois Children.

Currently, federal and state dollars pay for pre-school for 130,000 low-income or academically “at risk” Illinois children, but the new law aims to make pre-K available regardless of income, with the goal of enrolling 190,000 children in publicly-funded preschool by 2010. This distinction is important. It's hard to miss the fact that balancing work and family is an issue felt by almost all working Americans, including the increasingly squeezed middle class.

Florida, Georgia and Oklahoma currently offer pre-school to all four-year olds. Illinois' commitment to the goal of pre-school for all three-year olds as well is a smart and needed policy advance, raising the bar for early education. Let's see who follows.

★
VERMONT

MASSACHUSETTS AIN'T THE ONLY PLAN IN TOWN

It's become blatantly clear that, with 47 million Americans uninsured, America has a health care coverage crisis. Fed up with federal inaction, states have started expanding coverage on their own terms.

While Massachusetts' health plan got the media splash, Vermont enacted a far better plan in 2006 with clearer standards for health care affordability and without the problematic "individual mandate"—the cornerstone of the Massachusetts plan—that requires struggling middle-class families to purchase health insurance without addressing its skyrocketing costs.

In contrast, Vermont's 70,000 uninsured will have the option to purchase "Catamount Health," a comprehensive insurance package offered by health insurers. Premiums are subsidized on a sliding scale for families who earn less than 300% of the federal poverty level (\$60,000 for a family of four). Vermont will also offer a program to help workers afford employer-based coverage.

The program is paid for through a combination of cigarette and tobacco tax increases, a \$365-per-employee annual assessment on employers that do not provide private coverage, and Medicaid funds. To improve health and reduce costs, Vermont is doing things like developing a new chronic care management program.

As a voluntary system, Vermont's plan does not ensure universal coverage. But it promises to make a significant dent in the size of the state's uninsured population.

★
ALABAMA

TAKING THE TAX BURDEN OFF THE WORKING POOR

Too often, the debate about taxes is oversimplified into two positions: high taxes or low taxes. This obfuscates the real issues: who is being taxed, how much, and to what end? For example, California is considered a "high-tax" state. But, in what many would consider smart tax policy, the state imposes no income tax until a married couple with two children makes at least \$42,700. In contrast, other supposed "low-tax" states hit poorer working families much harder, largely because they let wealthier residents and corporations off the hook for paying their fair share of taxes.

A report this year by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities found that in 19 states that levy income taxes, two-parent families of four with incomes below the federal poverty line are liable for income tax.

Among these states was Alabama. Until this year, Alabama was the only state in the nation that taxed the income of working families making less than \$10,000 per year.

2006 changed that. New legislation makes the first \$12,500 of income exempt from taxes for a family of four. Because it concentrated tax relief at the bottom, Alabama's tax changes, however modest, delivered more help to working families in that state than the rubber stamp tax cuts, skewed to favor wealthy taxpayers, that are too often seen on the federal level.

★
COLORADO

RIDING THE POPULAR VOTE ALL THE WAY TO THE WHITE HOUSE

The real sin of the 2000 presidential election wasn't the few hundred mishandled butterfly ballots, it was that our convoluted Electoral College system left the winner of the national vote a loser of the election.

Imagine if the candidate who actually won the most votes nationwide automatically became President. In a bi-partisan effort, Colorado took the first step towards realizing that goal when its Senate passed legislation to implement what is being called the interstate "Agreement among the States to Elect the President by National Popular Vote."

Under the interstate agreement, the participating states would award all of their electoral votes from the presidential candidate receiving the most votes of Americans in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The National Popular Vote agreement would not take effect until identical legislation is passed by enough states to possess a majority of the electoral votes. Thus, the agreement would be on hold until an Electoral College majority for the presidential candidate who receives the most popular votes can be guaranteed.

Following Colorado's lead, Illinois, Missouri, California, and Louisiana introduced National Popular Vote legislation in their state houses. California's bill passed both houses of the legislature before being vetoed by Governor Schwarzenegger. In all, 29 states have legislative sponsors for the bill for the upcoming 2007 legislative sessions.

As Colorado Senate Majority Leader Ken Gordon said, "I think it makes sense to make the President the person who gets the most votes. It is revolutionary, I admit. It is called democracy."

★
WISCONSIN

SMART GROWTH AND CLEAN JOBS

State legislatures are dismantling the myth that environmental protection and economic growth are mutually exclusive. In 2006, the Wisconsin State Legislature passed a renewable energy bill that could create over 2,000 jobs for the state and save its businesses and homeowners over 200 million dollars a year in heating costs.

Thanks to this legislation, ten percent of the state's electricity will be generated by renewable sources by 2015, resulting in a decrease of 5.5 million tons of greenhouse gases. By 2011, the six largest state agencies will purchase 20 percent of their energy from renewable sources. The Act also requires the state to update building codes to include higher efficiency standards and creates special energy standards for state building projects and purchases.

And here's the kicker: the bill creates new industries and new jobs. Not to mention the fact that the Wisconsin Act expands the technology muscle of the state by investing new funds in research and the development of state-specific alternative energy sources, such as testing the feasibility and cost-effectiveness of burning leftover corn plants to heat residential spaces.

With the federal government AWOL on the dangers of global warming, the state of Wisconsin joins Colorado, California and others that are moving us towards energy independence and confronting global warming, one state at a time.

2006 Injustice Index

Wages that an average CEO earns before lunchtime: **more than a full-time minimum wage worker makes in a year**

Ratio of the average U.S. CEO's annual pay to a minimum wage worker's: **821:1**

Year when this ratio reached its highest so far: **2006**

Total compensation in 2005 of Barry Diller of IAC/Interactive, the highest paid CEO in the US today: **\$469 million**

Additional amount that Mr. Diller received in new stock options "to motivate Mr. Diller for future performance": **\$7.6 million**

Percentage of Americans who feel chronically overworked: **30**

Years of unused vacation time that American workers collectively give back to their employers each year: **1.6 million**

Percentage of women earning less than \$40,000 per year who receive no paid vacation time at all: **37**

Payment per episode that Donald Trump receives to host The Apprentice: **\$3,000,000**

Average amount that companies spend to recruit a new CEO from outside the company: **\$2,000,000**

Probability that the newly hired CEO will either quit or be fired within the first eighteen months: **1 in 2**

Estimated number of people lined up outside the new M&M store set to open in Times Square responding to ads for "on-the-spot" hiring for 200 jobs, 65 of which were full-time: between **5,000 and 6,000**

Starting salary that drew them there: **\$10.75 per hour**

Fee Paris Hilton is seeking to host a New Year's Eve party in NYC, Miami, or L.A.: **\$100,000 plus a private jet**

Amount that Ms. Hilton is set to inherit from the Hilton Hotel fortune: **\$350 million**

Number of times that Congress has reduced the estate tax since it last raised the federal minimum wage: **9**

Longest period in which the federal minimum wage has not been increased: **1997-2006**

Number of workers who would directly benefit from an increase in the minimum wage: **5.6 million**

Number of very large estates that would directly benefit from a reduction in the estate tax: **8,200**

Highest price per custom-fitted, handmade power suit in Armani's new line, which hopes to respond to what ex-Gucci head designer Tom Ford calls "a lot of pent-up demand for true luxury [from men who] are getting rich first, and they want to deck themselves out before they deck out their wives": **\$20,000**

Number of households using credit to cover basic living expenses: **7 in 10**

Amount in tax breaks and subsidies that last year's energy bill paid out to the gas and oil industry during a period of record profits and higher prices at the pump: **\$6 billion**

Campaign donations that Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison, who voted for the energy bill, received from the oil and gas industry: **\$500,000**, making her the top recipient of oil contributions in the 2006 election cycle

Percentage of U.S. workers who are confident they will be able to live comfortably after retirement: **68**

Percentage who have saved less than \$25,000 toward their retirement: **53**

It was the **best** of times, it was the **worst** of times.

Percent of African-American and Latino families that have zero or negative net worth, respectively: **31 and 38**

Date on which *USA Today* reported that Dr. Anthony Griffin of the Beverly Hills Cosmetic Surgery Institute, who appears on the ABC program *Extreme Makeover*, predicted that CEOs will lead a surge in male cosmetic surgery because, he says, "for instance, executives on trial for corporate scandals would improve their chances for acquittal with a makeover just before trial": **November 4, 2006**

Date on which the Dow Jones Industrial Average reached its all-time high: **October 26, 2006**

Decrease in percentage of Americans who own stocks from 2004 to 2006, the first such decline on record: **51.9% to 48.6%**

Total Wal-Mart received in government subsidies, sometimes called "corporate welfare" by activists, in 2005: **\$3.75 billion**

Percent of the decline in welfare caseloads that is due to TANF programs failing to serve families that are poor enough to qualify, rather than due to a reduction in the number of families poor enough to qualify for aid, in the ten years since "welfare reform": **57**

Percentage of the GDP that went to wages and salaries in the first half of 2006: **51.8**

Time when the percentage of GDP belonging to wages and salaries was lower than in 2006, out of the 77 previous years for which these data are available: **never**

Projected total in Christmas bonuses that the five largest investment banks in New York City will pay out in 2006: **\$36 billion**

Estimated additional amount U.S. workers would receive annually if all employers obeyed workplace laws: **\$19 billion**

Ratio of compensation of CEOs of publicly traded defense companies to privates before September 11th, 2001: **190 to 1**

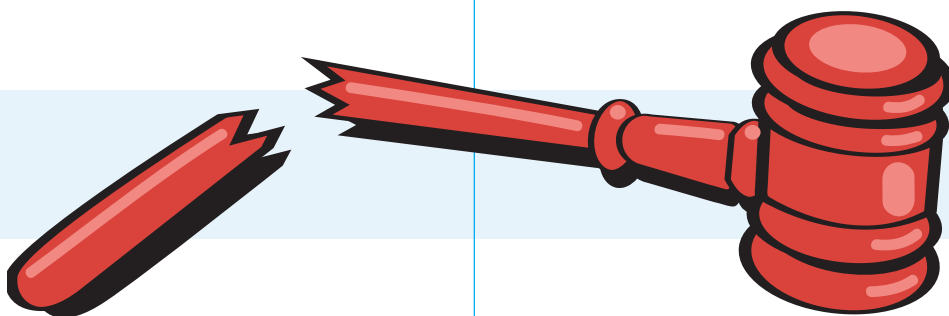
Ratio in 2006: **308 to 1**

Percentage increase in out-of-pocket medical expenses for the average American in the past 5 years: **93**

Estimated amount the U.S. would save each year on paperwork if it adopted single-payer health care: **\$161,000,000,000**

Date on which incoming Treasury Secretary Hank Paulson announced "Amid this country's strong economic expansion, many Americans simply aren't feeling the benefits. Many aren't seeing significant increases in their take-home pay. Their increases in wages are being eaten up by high energy prices and rising health care costs, among others": **August 2, 2006**

According to exit polls in the midterm elections, percentage of Americans who think life for the next generation will be about the same or worse respectively: **28, 40**



FAMILY RESEARCH COUNCIL

When the scandal surrounding Congressman Mark Foley's pedophilic abuses of congressional pages broke in early fall of 2006, Tony Perkins – president of this \$10.2 million stronghold of the religious right movement - saw a golden opportunity, issuing this statement: "It's shocking. But it shouldn't be totally surprising. When we hold up tolerance and diversity as the guideposts for public life, this is what you end up getting. You get congressmen chasing 16-year-olds down the halls of Congress." Formerly the pet project of Focus on the Family's James Dobson, the Family Research Council greases the wheels of big ideas like dismantling the separation between church and state and suppressing reproductive rights.

- **Getting It Straight: What the Research Shows About Homosexuality** by Timothy J. Dailey and Peter Sprigg / This book argues, among other things, that coming out will lead to an early death. Its purpose is to dispel the myth that "homosexuality is harmless."
- **Women Who Make the World Worse** by Kate O'Beirne / O'Beirne's first book accuses leading feminists of fracturing families, driven by the notion that men are the enemy.
- **"How U.S. Official Promotes Marriage To Help Poor Kids"** by Laura Meckler / Writing in the *Wall Street Journal*, Meckler endorses the government's decision to spend more than \$5 million in taxpayer funds to promote healthy marriage initiatives.

CATO INSTITUTE

In a year in which most experts focused on the importance of early childhood education to academic achievement, the Cato Institute argued against the entire concept of Universal Pre-School. As an alternative, Cato wants tax breaks to allow one parent (let's guess which one they mean) to stay at home, saying "Instead of forcing both parents into the workplace through heavy taxation, the government should reduce the tax burden on families, allowing childcare to remain in the capable hands of parents." If only Cato used its massive budget of \$15.6 million to advocate for policies that actually address the challenges of working families, which can't be solved by just a tax break.

- **"The Fallacy of Campaign Finance Reform"** by John Samples / Contrary to the argument that campaign finance reform will open up the electoral process, this report argues that reducing soft money and special interest contributions will reduce competition and make it more likely that incumbents will hold onto their seats.
- **Medicare Meets Mephistopheles** by David Hyman / This book argues that "Medicare may be the greatest trick the devil ever played... It turns seniors into health care gluttons... Medicare makes Democrats lust for socialized medicine, while its imperviousness to reform makes Republicans angrier and angrier."
- **"Affordable' Economics"** by Alan Reynolds / Reynolds believes certain things *should* be financially out of reach for average Americans: "Doesn't the middle class deserve bargain Barolo and budget Bordeaux?... If it seems easy to afford everything you want, then you aren't middle class."

Eye on the Right



THE HERITAGE FOUNDATION

The Heritage Foundation's ties to convicted lobbyist Jack Abramoff made the news this year. But instead of running away from the practices that landed Abramoff in jail, Heritage ran towards them, hiring a lobbyist to protect the lobbying culture in which it is firmly entrenched. From hosting gatherings of the K-Street Project (an invite-only group of conservative Senators and lobbyists) at its eight-story headquarters on Capitol Hill to paying for plush policy briefing vacations for elected officials, Heritage has a vested interest in the status quo. Sounds a little like their policy agenda as well.

- **"Card Check Undermines Workplace Democracy"** by James Sherk / Sherk argues that card check procedures, in which employees at a given company can unionize if a majority of employees sign a card saying they'd like to, do not shield workers from employer intimidation, as many labor activists have argued, but instead infringe on the right to privacy when one votes.
- **"Stupid Soldiers: Central to Left's Worldview"** by Tim Kane / Arguing that Senator John Kerry's gaffe that without education, "you get stuck in Iraq" was really no gaffe at all but a central conviction of the "anti-war Left," Kane suggests that: "Antiwar criticism has morphed into a patronizing attitude toward GIs, by way of questioning the quality of the men and women who volunteer to serve. Perhaps it is easier for the antiwar Left to believe that soldiers are unintelligent than to believe that they are taking risks willingly because they actually believe in the war's purpose."
- **"Importing Poverty: Immigration and Poverty in the United States"** by Robert E. Rector / The federal government, according to Rector, is spending trillions to lift people out of poverty while its immigration policy is importing poverty from abroad and allowing these recent arrivals to feed off our entitlement programs.

THE COMPETITIVE ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE

The Competitive Enterprise Institute wouldn't touch environmentalism with a ten foot pole—because it might kill them. Not only did they write “Smoking as a Civic Duty,” but 2006 was also the year in which CEI warned against making fuel economy standards more robust because it would lead to downsizing in the automotive industry, which would lead to more car accident deaths. CEI criticized the Archbishop of Canterbury when he asked Christians to help lower greenhouse gas emissions, saying that lowering these levels, even in “baby steps,” would “result in the deaths of more people in the U.S. than global warming would worldwide.”

- **“Unhappy Days Are Here Again”** by Henry I. Miller / Writing in the *National Review Online*, Miller offers his analysis of the incoming Congressional leadership: “Not only is Pelosi herself radical, but many of the powerful Democratic committee chairmen-in-waiting are members in good standing of what veteran bipartisan presidential advisor David Gergen has called the ‘loony Left.’”
- **“Put a Stop to ‘Big Tofu’”** by Gregory Conko / More powerful than Big Business or Big Oil is Big Tofu, which is exerting its coercive influence on the American diet. Says Conko: “From attacks on movie theater popcorn to fast food burgers, Big Tofu wants to keep you from dining on steak, French fries, soda and anything else it deems bad for you. The top priority: protect you from yourself by imposing its vegan-leaning, beans-and-rice, ‘if-it-tastes-good-it-must-be-bad-for-you’ views on what constitutes a proper diet.”

THE MANHATTAN INSTITUTE

Fight, fight! From the home base of President Bush's “compassionate conservatism” comes a year of flat-out contradiction on immigration. In one corner, Fellow Tamar Jacoby argues that immigrants are good for the American economy and that the best policy will lead to gradual citizenship for these “hard-working, churchgoing people with families.” And in the other corner, fellow Heather Mac Donald pleads with the government to close the borders, stop the “Immigrant Gang Plague” and give relief to “police forces and county jails reeling under the burden of illegal-alien rapists.” The Institute is funded in part by oil companies, behemoth banks, and conservative foundations, and with its opposing views on immigration, it can please its entire donor base.

- **“Hispanic Family Values? Runaway illegitimacy is creating a new U.S. underclass”** Heather Mac Donald / Mac Donald argues that allowing immigrants, with their high illegitimacy rates, to cross our borders amounts to an attack on the traditional American family.
- **“Making Civil Justice Sane”** by Philip K. Howard / Making the case for tort “reform,” this article suggests that the threat of lawsuits is responsible not only for the repeal of “fun,” but ultimately for childhood obesity: “Fun, for example, is fraught with fear. Schools ban dodgeball and tag. Jungle gyms, diving boards, and seesaws seem relics of some past civilization. Meanwhile our children, rescued from the risks of roughhousing and accident, suffer from the far greater risk of obesity, now at epidemic proportions.”

THE HOOVER INSTITUTION

In 2006, the Hoover Institution offered its support of low-income workers: “Part of the low income of low-income workers is a result of many of them choosing to work fewer hours... Such choices are not necessarily bad choices; more power to them if they want to enjoy their leisure.” The market value of the Hoover Institution's endowment exceeds \$250 million, so it's not such a heavy lift to raise their \$25 million annual budget. It's surprising then, with all their leisure time, that the Hoover Institution hasn't come up with a better analysis of the impact of globalization on our economy than claiming that poor people are poor because they want more free time.

- **“Food Stamps: The Never-Ending Story”** by Jeffrey M. Jones / This article claims that food stamps may have made sense during the Great Depression, but today amount to nothing more than runaway entitlement.
- **“The High Price of Cheap Drugs”** by Russell Roberts / This analysis of the different methods of making prescription drugs more affordable ends with a blanket indictment of any government intervention to keep costs in check: “[T]he result would be lower prices today and less innovation tomorrow...who would want to punish their grandchildren in this way?”

THE AMERICAN ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE

A tireless proponent of rolling back regular Americans' access to the courts, AEI Fellow Ted Frank called the effort to help Katrina victims rebuild just one more attempt to “scapegoat insurance companies on behalf of trial attorneys.” Luckily, insurance companies have Frank to do their bidding. Entering a debate in which both homeowners and the insurance companies that are supposed to protect them had valid arguments, Frank was quick to take the side of insurance companies by backing arguments that would excuse them from paying deserving claims. Hopefully, the dozens of former AEI staffers that have been absorbed into the Bush Administration are a little more concerned about the real victims of this humanitarian crisis.

- **“Ignore Democrat Spin: the Bush Economy is Solid”** by Kevin A. Hassett / Hassett on the economy before November 7: “So the Bush economy is pretty terrific. It will be interesting to see if voters decide to surprise the pundits and reward Republicans tomorrow at the polls.”
- **“Halloween Is an Economist's Biggest Nightmare”** by Kevin A. Hassett / This opinion piece takes issue with what its author deems the most harrowing of all candy bars, the Charleston Chew, and argues that instead of candy, trick-or-treaters should get money on Halloween.
- ***The Wal-Mart Revolution: How Big-Box Stores Benefit Consumers, Workers, and the Economy*** by Richard Vedder and Wendell Cox / Based on the economic theory that people use money to buy things that make them happy, this book argues that Big Box stores benefit society because their cheaper prices allow people to buy more and thus to be happier.

DMI Interviews

★ ANDREW GILLUM

29, Vice Mayor and Commissioner of the City of Tallahassee, Florida and the founder of People For the American Way Foundation's Young Elected Officials Network



2006: “In my capacity as a local elected official, I have had the opportunity to affect policy at the most basic level. I am particularly proud of the leadership and support I was able to lend in the fight to achieve more affordable and diverse housing communities through the Inclusionary

Housing Ordinance. Through this ordinance, developers are given incentives to build low to moderate income housing in newly developed neighborhoods. The initiative ensures that our most fundamental workers—teachers, police officers and firefighters—can afford to live in neighborhoods where they work.”

2007: “Local communities are facing major funding shortages to support local homeless initiatives, affordable housing, and low-income assistance programs, among the many national issues affecting all communities. Domestic policy in 2007 should include initiatives to expand federal assistance to local communities to address education, security, low income housing assistance, economic development and other local and state issues that have been neglected by the federal government over the past several years.”

★ NATHAN NEWMAN

Policy Director for the Progressive States Network



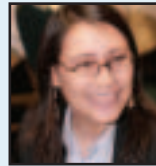
2006: “Through building the Progressive States Network of activists and state legislators around the country, we’ve been able to highlight and support some of the most innovative policy proposals around the country, from the large retailer living wage law in Chicago to promoting clean energy

proposals. We’re very proud to produce a twice-weekly Stateside Dispatch that promotes the best practices that progressives are proposing and enacting into law across the country. Our goal in our first year has been to bring together labor unions, environmental groups, ‘netroots’ online activists, health care advocates and community organizations to work together with state legislators to create a multi-issue agenda that can reach new voters and new coalition partners.”

2007: “A lot of our work has been aimed at working with activists and legislators to reframe the progressive agenda in ways that accomplish that goal of expanding progressive coalitions. Issues like Paid Sick Days bring many “family values voters” into our coalitions, just as ‘smart growth’ urban planning policies help recruit exurban voters frustrated by long commutes. Progressives also need to be proactive in reforming our state tax systems to expose hidden tax subsidies, increase fairness, and hold businesses receiving government money accountable for creating decent-paying jobs that strengthen local economies.”

★ AMY L. BESAW

Director of Honoring Nations at the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development



2006: “The Harvard Project aims to understand and foster the conditions under which sustained, self-determined social and economic development is achieved among American Indian nations...Honoring Nations provides an important place for people from diverse backgrounds and

perspectives to talk about important policy issues while holding up examples of excellence—on-the-ground-work—for others to learn from. From a nation that built a justice system that restores offenders to the tribal family, to a tribally designated non-profit (similar to a federally designated non-profit) that manages educational funds for a nation, American Indian nations are building stronger, healthier communities while considering the future generations to come.”

2007: “In 2007, it is important to continue to encourage and engage in better discussions on Indian Affairs throughout the U.S. The base of those discussions must be the understanding that American Indian nations are individual political entities. With this foundation, the government-to-government relationships can be strengthened. I see this as doing two important things: the first is enabling tribal governments to better serve their citizenry; the second is deepening U.S. domestic policies to include the perspectives and needs of American Indian people. As far as specific policies, it is hard to create a ranking. Education, health care, law enforcement, child welfare, etc. are all important and each Native nation has its different priorities.”

★ SENATOR TED KENNEDY

Massachusetts



2006: “Immigration is about who we are as Americans—whether we are bold enough to look to the future with confidence and open our doors to those who contribute to our progress, just as we have at important points throughout our history. It’s a complex challenge that can’t be solved by

building fences. There is no doubt that comprehensive immigration reform is urgently needed, and I was proud to join Senator John McCain in sponsoring the bill that passed the Senate and enjoys the support of religious leaders, immigration experts, Latino organizations, the business community and many, many others.”

2007: “We have a real opportunity to stand up for American families and workers after six long years in which their concerns and their values have been ignored. Economic progress may be seen on Wall Street, but it has left Main Street America behind. I look forward to making jobs pay by fighting for an increase in the minimum wage, helping families afford a college education for their children, bringing the miracles of modern medicine to average families through stem cell research and by making health insurance more affordable and available.”

8 People

Advancing Progressive Public Policy in 2006

★ JARED BERNSTEIN

Director of the Living Standards program at the Economic Policy Institute and author of the book All Together Now: Common Sense for a Fair Economy.



2006: “The main 2006 focus of the project I direct here was to raise awareness of the gap between the nation’s impressive productivity and the wages and incomes of working families. The issue became a major focus of policy makers and candidates on all sides of the political spectrum. It showed up in the media, and was discussed and debated by everyone

from Ben Bernanke (Fed chief) to Robert Rubin to successful midterm Senate candidates like Jim Webb and Sherrod Brown.”

2007: “I’m most interested in setting up a litmus test for domestic economic policy: does this idea help to close the gap between productivity and earnings; will it help ensure more broadly shared prosperity, pushing back against economic inequality? In this regard, raising the minimum wage is a no-brainer. But, despite the fact that many in the electorate favor a more progressive approach to meeting our economic challenges, the political climate probably won’t be very conducive to passing much legislation in 2007. So, our best plan is to start building and framing an effective debate on these issues for the 2008 presidential election, including restoring fiscal sanity, universal health care, pension reform, and a more balanced approach to globalization.”

★ MEWELAU HALL

Senior at the University of Miami, Fellow at Young People For the American Way, People of Color Caucus Representative for Students United Against Sweatshops



2006: “In 2006, I have led and contributed to various actions, including The University of Miami Workers Campaign and The Shanty Town— ‘Take Back the Land’ Anti-Gentrifying Development. [On] the Worker’s Campaign, I learned and taught the student community a great deal about the differences between Card Check and Secret Ballot [methods of creating a union in a given workplace], also I clarified the same information to many of the workers interested in getting involved with the strike. In the fight against Gentrification in late-August 2006, several community youth (including myself) and many more helped in the building of free housing for the homeless from materials found in your local dumpster.”

2007: “Since I was raised in Miami, it’s apparent to me that any policy that helps the victims of slum-lord communities, children in low-income communities who are going through schools that are simply unequipped to educate them, or the necessity of creating jobs should be a concern and a priority. Though I made it through, it should not be a struggle for everyone in my situation; also it should not have to be labeled as a ‘triumph’ because everyone deserves the basic necessities and rights to evaluation of Department of Housing and Urban Development and Category 8 housing that will include surprise inspections and a better tool for reprimanding slum-lords.”

★ MELANIE SLOAN

Executive Director of Citizens for Responsible Ethics in Washington (CREW)



2006: “CREW is most proud of two accomplishments. First, CREW made corruption a major issue in the 2006 congressional elections, and second, CREW played a significant role in cleaning Congress of corrupt members. CREW targeted and exposed members who betrayed their constituents through illegal and unethical activities. From its report Beyond DeLay: The 20 Most Corrupt Members of Congress (and five to watch), to the countless articles published based on CREW’s investigations and analysis, CREW’s efforts led to voters holding public officials accountable for their actions. Eight of the members of Congress listed in CREW’s report lost their elections and exit polls showed that corruption was the number one issue for a majority of voters on election day. Eleven members whom CREW has criticized are now under federal investigation. We hope that CREW’s work this past year will persuade the newly elected members of Congress to work for the public interest rather than on behalf of special interests.”

2007: “Every member of Congress must be held accountable for his or her actions. In recent years, however, Congress has refused to police itself. As a result, ethics reforms—particularly new oversight and enforcement mechanisms—must be implemented in the new Congress. An ethics reform package should include the creation of an Office of Public Integrity staffed by former prosecutors with public corruption experience to investigate allegations of wrongdoing by members of Congress. This would ensure fair and impartial investigations and work to de-politicize the ethics process.”

★ JEFF BLODGETT

Executive Director of Wellstone Action



2006: “Wellstone Action is a national training center running eight different programs for people involved in moving progressive policy and politics forward. Our most proud accomplishment in 2006 was training over 4,000 people around the country to be involved in progressive policy and political work of all different kinds. This included training 78 people who went on to win election to public offices. Progressive policy can be advanced when enough like-minded people step forward with strong skills and make change happen.”

2007: “In terms of 2007, we cannot forget that the elections were as much about family economic issues—the cost of health care, the cost of college and stagnant wages—as they were about Iraq. Serious action on health care costs for those insured is as critical as it is finding ways to cover more people. We also should radically re-think how higher education, the backbone of the American dream, stays within reach for most families and young people. The other progressive, visionary policy front we should be on is moving toward a new energy future. This is an area that has so many issue fronts; new jobs, the economy, foreign policy, the environment, even farm and rural policies.”



Fake TV News: Widespread and Undisclosed

Report from the Center for Media and Democracy, released in April 2006

This report tracks ten months in the lives of “video news releases,” or video feeds produced by public relations firms on behalf of paying clients that are then picked up by news stations and aired as the real, objective deal. Using maps, video, and other multimedia, the Center for Media and Democracy catches the corporation-sponsored creation of “fake” news in the act. And here’s the bottom line: in total, the 77 T.V. stations who accept these releases reach over 50% of the U.S. population.

Party in Search of a Notion

**from the May issue of the *American Prospect*,
by Michael Tomasky**

To successfully overtake the radical individualism that fuels current conservatism, Michael Tomasky argues that Democrats need to stop cherry-picking policy proposals. Instead, liberal leadership should embrace a unifying big idea, one that asks Americans to contribute to projects larger than themselves with the understanding that their wellbeing is inextricably tied to the common good.

Resilient & Reaching for More: Challenges and Benefits of Higher Education for Welfare Participants and Their Children

Report from the Institute for Women’s Policy Research, released in April 2006

According to this study, access to higher education helps women on welfare to stop substance abuse, leave violent relationships, develop self-confidence, and increase earning power and financial security. Its spillover effects are striking as well: when women on welfare begin college classes, their children begin to do better in school. Reading this report begs the question: just what were the Feds thinking this year when they unveiled gravely misguided new welfare regulations that limit access to higher education?

War on the Middle Class: How the Government, Big Business, and Special Interest Groups Are Waging War on the American Dream and How to Fight Back by Lou Dobbs

It’s important to hear that the already struggling middle class is being besieged by a triple threat. The government, according to Dobbs, is more in step with corporate and special interests than figuring out how to curb skyrocketing health insurance costs. Business culture is more attune to profits than to employee wellbeing. And the media is more focused on political horse races than on policy aimed at dismantling inequality. It’s especially important to hear these things from a free-market-lauding Republican who commands national attention each night.

Congress at the Midterm: Their 2005 Middle-Class Record

Report from the Drum Major Institute for Public Policy, released in June of 2006

Congress played no small part in driving the American Dream further out of reach for ordinary citizens in 2005. In vote after vote, Congress overwhelmingly disdained the concerns of middle-class Americans and opted instead to favor the already wealthy and powerful: a surefire recipe for a shrinking middle class.

Getting Punched: The Job and Family Clock

Report from the Center for Law and Social Policy, released in July 2006

Get this: giving employees the flexibility to deliver for the company while taking care of their families is actually good for employers’ bottom line. The research in this report points to the fact that flexible scheduling and family leave bolster employees’ company loyalty, reduce health care costs, shoot productivity up the charts, and pad the pocketbooks of shareholders.

Crashing the Gate: Netroots, Grassroots, and the Rise of People-Powered Politics

by Jerome Armstrong and Markos Moulitsas Zuniga

From the minds of two of the most trafficked and agenda-setting bloggers comes *Crashing the Gate*. The book offers an indictment of how the progressive movement does business, with highly paid consultants and issue-obsessed activists confining the Democratic Party to permanent minority status. To change business as usual, *Crashing the Gate* suggests replacing Washington’s *Insider Gate* with the power of everyday people to shape progressive policy and politics.

New Data Show Extraordinary Jump in Income Concentration in 2004

Report from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, released in October of 2006

In case you haven’t noticed (read: in case you’ve somehow missed the fact that your paycheck has remained stagnant while those of executives have surged by leaps and bounds), these are the cold hard facts. Part of a captivating series on economic inequality in the U.S., this report shows the all-but-unprecedented concentration of income for those in the upper management tiers.

One-Year After Katrina

**Colorlines Magazine, published in the
September/October 2006 Issue**

This multimedia report, representing Colorlines’ coverage of Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath, pays special attention to the specific challenges of rebuilding communities of color. Topics range from undocumented immigrants and African Americans finding themselves on the same side of the workplace bargaining table to whether certain populations should get priority in an evacuation. Taken together, the pieces profiled in this report highlight the central role that race plays in any discussion of Hurricane Katrina.

USE IT OR LOSE IT!

Chris Bowers of the influential blog MyDD had an idea. Democratic National Committee Chair Howard Dean's 50-State Strategy — supporting Democrats running for Congress in every state — was working. More seats were in play than anyone had thought possible. But, money wasn't keeping up with the need. At the same time, there were incumbent Democrats running barely or completely unopposed who had millions of dollars in their campaign accounts. Bowers suggested that his readers ask the cash-flush incumbents in their own states to give 30% of their campaign funds to support cash-strapped challengers. Move On sent an email echoing the call that afternoon, complete with names and phone numbers, and The Use It or Lose It Campaign was born. Just one week later, 20 safe congressional Democrats had chipped in over \$2.3 million dollars to campaigns that needed the funds.

MYSPACE MARCHES FOR IMMIGRANT RIGHTS!

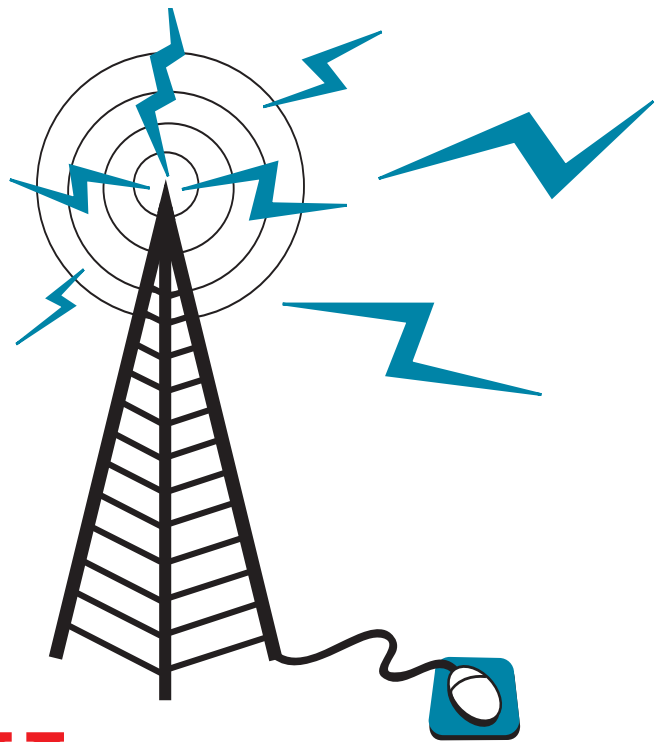
On March 25, 2006, 500,000 people protested for immigrant rights in Los Angeles. One in four of all middle and high school students in the city participated, an extraordinary turnout, and it wasn't by coincidence. MySpace.com, an online social network where people — mostly teens — post profiles and link to friends, was a critical hub. Protest organizers were able to communicate to students who had otherwise never participated in social activism. Teenagers learned how their friends — immigrants and the children of immigrants — were impacted firsthand by this debate. Thanks to MySpace, politics became personal, and the result was thousands of people in the street forcing a shift in the thinking of the hundreds on Capitol Hill deciding their fate.

YEARLY KOS!

Everyone from presidential hopefuls past and future to the Teamsters Union came to pay their respects to the netroots at the first annual Yearly Kos Convention in August. Organized by volunteers who met on the Daily Kos blog, Yearly Kos became a focal point for progressive leaders and institutions who sought to court the emergent netroots community. Panel discussions included the role of organized labor, building activism at the state level, and even the blogosphere's role in pushing for government investigations. Virtually every political publication sent reporters to speak to Yearly Kos attendees and report back on what they found. The conference helped non-bloggers put a face to the "mysterious" netroots and discovered it is people very much like themselves (though unfortunately less racially diverse than a group of progressives ought to be).

GEORGE ALLEN GOES MACACA!

In the age of YouTube, a website where people submit videos for the whole world to see, no gaffe goes un-broadcast. The most famous example of 'The YouTube Effect' on politics was on the failed re-election campaign of Virginia Senator George Allen. When Allen referred to a young volunteer for the James Webb for Senate campaign by a racist slur, it spread like wildfire, reviving accusations of Allen's racism in the press. Senator Allen's gaffe wouldn't have mattered as much if he hadn't been facing strong competition. Senator-Elect James Webb was drafted by the Virginia blogosphere to run for Senate, who put their money where their mice were: sixty percent of his funds came from the netroots.



Year in the Netroots

SHEDDING SOME SUNLIGHT FOUNDATION ON THE SUBJECT!

Corruption was one of the biggest issues in this year's election cycle. But how can people keep their elected officials honest if they have no idea what they are up to? The Sunlight Foundation began its work this year to empower the netroots with Web 2.0 technology to better hold representatives accountable. Projects launched this year included "Watchdogging 101," which brings together multiple good government groups' databases to allow people to track campaign contributions and lobbying expenditures by corporations with ease. The Foundation has also given grants to local blogs like The Bluegrass Report and Connecticut Local Politics to support their investigative work.

FROM POLITICS TO POLICY IN 2007!

Netroots-supported candidates are being sworn in to office in January. The netroots now has elected officials among its ranks, like the original bloggers Rep. John Conyers and Senator-Elect Sherrod Brown; their own political action committee, BlogPAC; successful volunteer recruitment projects like DoMoreThanVote; and proven fundraising technology tools like ActBlue. The Netroots is triumphant, but they shouldn't live-blog on their laurels. The question now becomes: can the netroots turn its passion for politics in to a passion for policy? The popularity and influence of the Drum Major Institute's public policy blog, the DMIBlog, and others like it, answers that question positively.

"I think what we ought to call this tax is the Paris Hilton tax. Paris Hilton, once this is passed, will be able to jet set around the world buying herself more bling and more little dogs to carry around in her purse and probably never work a day in her life. But while we are helping Paris with her problems, I think we need to think about the poorest among us, those people working two, three minimum wage jobs every single day simply to try to keep themselves alive and that we have turned our backs on now for over a decade."

—Congresswoman Louise Slaughter (D-NY) on the Estate Tax.

"Well, folks, if you earn \$40,000 a year and have a family of two children, you don't pay any taxes. So you probably, if you don't pay any taxes, you are not going to get a very big tax cut."—Congressman Dennis Hastert (R-IL) ignoring not only the income taxes paid by families in this tax bracket, but the sales and gas taxes paid by all Americans.

"I also say we need to do a few other things on top of that wall, and one of them being to put a little bit of wire on top here to provide a disincentive for people to climb over the top or put a ladder there. We could also electrify this wire with the kind of current that would not kill somebody, but it would simply be a discouragement for them to be fooling around with it. We do that with livestock all the time."—Congressman Steve King (R-IA) speaking on the House floor about his plans to erect an electrified wall along the southern United States border.

"In other words, these voters saw the minimum wage as a moral or 'values' issue. They decided that restaurant meals don't taste all that good when they're served by people who have trouble feeding themselves."—Barbara Ehrenreich on the passage of six state ballot initiatives to raise the minimum wage.

"No one likes the word 'minority,' so it's not in my new official title."—Incoming Senate "Republican" Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY).

"You want to talk about pork—I apologize to the pigs."—New York State Assemblyman Richard Brodsky saying that economic development subsidies and other budgetary "pork barrel" make up so much of the budget, the state ought to apologize to pigs.

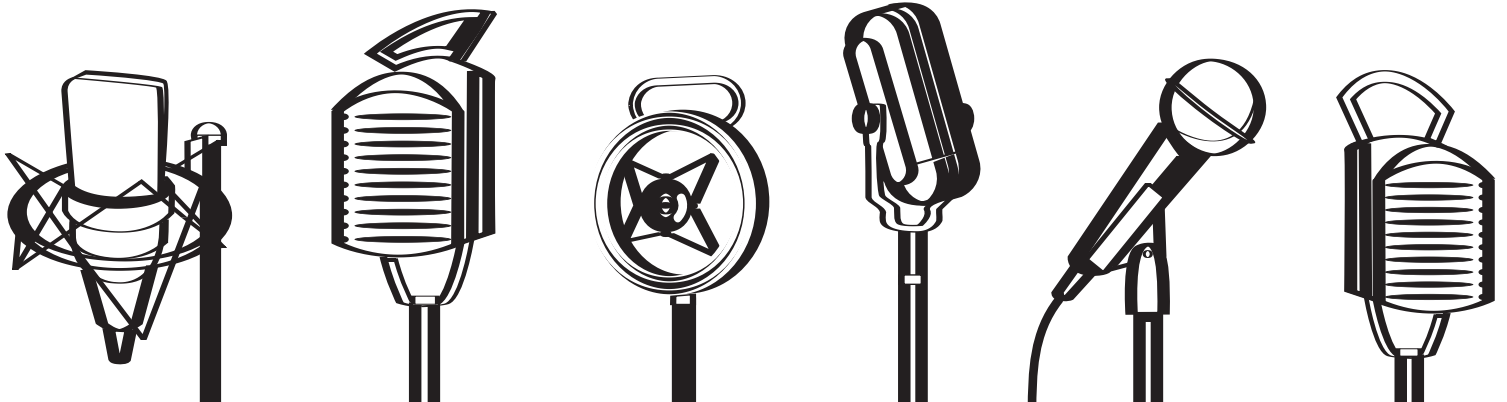
"It's not Robin Hood; the truth of the matter is you rob the hood."—Adelaide L. Sanford, Vice Chancellor of the New York Board of Regents, on inequities faced by urban school districts who don't get their fair share of state funding.

"The amazing thing about this election, and what surprised me somewhat, which goes to show I should not try punditry, is that this economy's strong. And, a lot of times, off years are decided by the economy. And yet, you know, obviously there was a different feel out there for the electorate. The economy—the good news in the economy was overwhelmed by the toughness of this fight and toughness of the war."—President Bush on how he thinks the economy is strong on the day after the mid-term elections.

"I say this to you, Lou, isn't this good that war has been declared on the middle class? When America declares war on things—drugs, terror—usually the subject of that war ends up doing quite well."—The Daily Show's Jon Stewart speaking to guest Lou Dobbs and his new book, *War on the Middle Class*.

"If you vote for those Democrats, they're going to tax you into the poor house, and on the way to the poor house you'll meet a terrorist on every street corner. And when you try to run away from the terrorist, you will trip over an illegal immigrant. Now as near as I can tell, that's their campaign."—President Bill Clinton's take on the Republican message during the mid-term campaign.

Voices of 2006



“This rebuilding of New Orleans gives us the perfect opportunity to see if we’re ready to extend the legacy of Dr. King and the Civil Rights Movement. Look around this room and realize that the final chapter of that movement still waits for a generation with the courage to write it...His challenge was to reverse 80 years of legalized apartheid – a veritable way of life in our land of freedom. Our challenge is merely to rebuild a great city in times of unbelievable political callousness and corruption.” —Wynton Marsalis, New Orleans native and Director of Jazz at Lincoln Center, speaking at Tulane University on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, the day on which the university first reopened after Hurricane Katrina.

“I’m interested in getting results that will help a lot of people, and I’m one of them. ... This was an important part of my life savings, and I just don’t think that the response was one that I could accept.”

—Senator Trent Lott (R-MI) defending his lawsuit against State Farm insurance after his home was destroyed by Hurricane Katrina, despite having previously voiced support for tort reform: “It’s sue, sue, sue... That’s not the answer.”

“If you can afford it, it’s the best health care system in the world, but, increasingly, people aren’t able to afford it.” “We just hoped and prayed that nothing would happen.” “Corporations need to think about how much it’s going to hurt someone if they raise the price of a particular product so high.” —Respondents to a *USA TODAY*, ABC News and Kaiser Family Foundation survey that found that an estimated 80% of Americans are dissatisfied with the total amount the U.S. spends on health care.

“Richard M. Daley is the mayor of the ‘city that works,’ and now the mayor of the city that works for lower wages.” —Statement released by Congressman Jesse Jackson Jr. (D-IL) on Chicago Mayor Richard Daley’s veto of the living wage ordinance, which would have required big box stores to pay their employees \$9.50 an hour.

“But by and large, when it comes to a voting machine, the average voter is getting a lemon—the Ford Pinto of voting technology.”
—Congressman John Conyers (D-MI) writing on Daily Kos.com.

The path to adulthood for today’s young adults is a full-blown obstacle course of loop-de-loop turns and jagged-edged hurdles.”

—Tamara Draut, author, “Strapped: Why America’s 20- and 30- Somethings Can’t Get Ahead.”

“If I thought Al Gore’s movie was as you like to say, fair and balanced, I’d say, everyone should go see it. But why go see propaganda? You don’t go see Joseph Goebbels’ films to see the truth about Nazi Germany. You don’t go see Al Gore’s films to see the truth about global warming.” —Sterling Burnett, a senior fellow at the Exxon-funded National Center for Policy Analysis, comparing Al Gore to Nazi propagandist Joseph Goebbels.

“The internet is not something you just dump something on. It’s not a truck. It’s a series of tubes. And if you don’t understand, those tubes can be filled and if they are filled, when you put your message in, it gets in line and it’s going to be delayed by anyone that puts into that tube enormous amounts of material, enormous amounts of material. I just the other day got—an Internet was sent by my staff at 10 o’clock in the morning on Friday and I just got it yesterday. Why? Because it got tangled up with all these things going on the Internet commercially.”

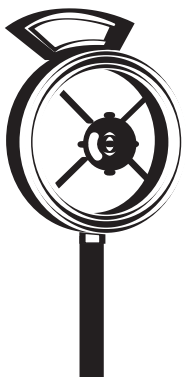
—Senate Commerce Committee Chairman Ted Stevens (R-AK) attempting to understand the workings of the Internet during a debate on net neutrality.

“It is not simply that reconstruction efforts have languished, and well connected corporations have reaped the rewards while tens of thousands remain displaced. What is most troubling is the stubborn refusal, one year later, to acknowledge or do anything to address the endemic poverty and structural inequity that played a central role in the devastating nature of this disaster.” —Congresswoman Barbara Lee (D-CA) on the one-year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina.

“According to a new study, bad economic times can actually be good for you because people tend to exercise more and eat better. This is not a recession, this is the Bush Health Care Plan.” —Jay Leno on his late night TV show.

“Liberals on campus make me sick, and I want to figure out how to combat them better.” “[In her book *Nickel and Dimed*, Barbara Ehrenreich’s] point was to show that you can’t survive on minimum wage, but what I took from it is that single people aren’t supposed to be out there trying it on their own.” “I came here to network with my fellow right-wing conspirators, because we’re all going to be running the country someday.”

—College students attending the National Conservative Student Conference in DC, as quoted in *Harper’s Magazine*.



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