

A Chronicle of selected Letters to the S.F. Chronicle

Introduction

I have to admit it. I'm a compulsive writer of letters and op/eds to the S.F. Chronicle. While I've written five plays, one and a half novels, poetry, songs, short and long stories, essays and medical articles and letters based on my professional life as a physician, I'm also a political letter-writing junkie. I often think that the readers of the Chronicle are getting bamboozled by the Bay Area's most widely circulating paper. I sometimes think that I wouldn't subscribe to the damned paper myself if it weren't that my wife and I depend on the Datebook section for its culture value and events calendar. The constant massaging of the news, the concealment of bias, raises my blood pressure too much. I know I'm not alone. Many people don't trust the big media, just like no one trusts politicians or Trump. That's not as good as you might think. It becomes problematic since much distrust of media isn't based on critical thinking or good background, historical knowledge or excellent analysis. It's just a generic distrust, by people who have a reasonable feeling there is an agenda--a feeling that there is always some underlying theme or slant. Well it's true. It's called capitalism.

Although Fox news is the most outrageously biased by ideology, one reason why many people watch Fox or would vote for Donald Trump is because they fall for charlatans who wear their ideology proudly, and place their dishonest slants right out front on the table.

Unfortunately many Americans are either gullible enough or weren't provided a good enough critical thinking education to believe that being a bit more open about your prejudices, more out front with your shit, can make up for the fact that what you stand for stinks of self-interest, sectarianism or prejudices of one type or another. That's not a good thing at all because it isn't the same thing as paying close enough attention to subtexts like racism, sexism, bullying, national chauvinism, but instead means they are settling for the performance values. That makes us even more vulnerable to manipulation (whether on-line, on TV or elsewhere).

But in any case, I do read the monopoly paper cover to cover often starting with the sports section, continuing with Piraro's Bizarro and the Bridge and Chess problems since none of that will upset this old geezer too much. Eventually I head over to the news and headlines—some of it informative, but many headlines written very cynically to misrepresent what is actually going on—that's when things start to fall apart (to quote Chinua Achebe's title about Europe's penetration and destruction of the cultures of Africa). And that's when I run to the computer or flush the toilet. I've been doing this letter writing thing much of my adult life, maybe 50 years or more, even though I managed to practice medicine for la gente with great commitment since 1970.

I suppose I'm not as good a damned writer as I want to think I am, but I've got to tell you that the S.F. Chronicle a half century ago developed a bad habit of not printing about 95%-98% of my letters. Sadly, in the fashion of a true masochist I nevertheless

continued firing off these letters into that inescapable black hole, sometimes even a few a week.

At some point a few years back I got a Michael Moore type inspiration. How about if I begin to collect these and then see if I can find a way to publish them myself? I don't think that will happen but I'm posting some of them here. When you read this stuff you may laugh, sneer or cry...or laugh and cry, or nod or shake your head, or just be plain bored, like some of my critics. I'm including a few that actually were printed. These letters are about everything from the importance of herd immunity, immunizations, public health and medicine; to the obfuscations of foreign policy, the police murders of unarmed black men; electoral politics and its ills, the chicanery of American alliances and allegiances to some of the most ruthless dictatorships as well as the only Apartheid State that remains on earth—that one we call a “true” democracy in the Middle East because it resembles and well represents our own “slavery legalizing” democracy. Then there are letters about the capitalist economy and its mysteries and miseries; about how unfree our democracy and our media actually are.

Does it matter why the Chron doesn't print many of my letters? Well, who knows? Certainly there must be thousands of people writing, whose letters also don't get. Maybe there's no consistency or conspiracy here at all, no ideological litmus test, no line coming down from on high at the Hearst chain's SF crowning glory or from Kentucky Fried Chicken or Bill Gates. Or maybe there is. Regardless, I'm hoping that at least here and there I'll get a rise out you; and perhaps I'll spark your interest with

something you hadn't thought about. If even one makes you laugh or think about something you hadn't thought about before, or sparks your imagination I'm content. If you think to yourself, "I wouldn't print that tripe either", you can write and tell me. Some letters may seem little more than repetition—same ole, same ole. Well I am old, so cut me some slack as they say.

I have noticed that often the Chronicle publishes letters on the same topics as mine that are narrowly constructed and avoid context and subtext. I do believe that connecting dots is a worthwhile endeavor. I'm an old fan of the muckracker journalist guy, Lincoln Steffans and, of course, of Mark Twain's satire. I won't say that democracy is completely dead in the U.S. no country that legalized slavery in its "revolutionary" Constitution is likely to ever strongly defend democratic values. The Constitution itself invoked a dance with the devil; The Donald's appearance on the throne reiterates that nothing much has changed.

Selected Letters to the Editor

On Acquittal of the murderer of Trayvon Martin (2013)

As a not-African American person I want to thank Caille Millner for a beautiful and honest discussion of how Trayvon Martin's parents are dealing with the jury verdict. Caille, and Obama also, is right. Nevertheless, media in general have kept the subtext of this important case out of the discussion, as revealed in an article by law professor Marjorie Cohn now up on Truth-out.org. Cohn shows how, regardless of the jurors attitudes on race, the Judge (with some help from the Police) assured the acquittal before and during the trial. The importance of this is that the verdict shouldn't be used to imply that most non-African Americans tend to see the case Zimmerman's way. The opposite is the case. Despite the big mouthed racist Right that media helps promote, most Americans are appalled that this could happen. What Heraldo (re hoodies) or overt racists say about the case perpetuates a myth that most Americans accept this murder. But most people are appalled that Zimmerman was exonerated. The problem is the unjust system masquerading as democracy in order to disenfranchise us all. I think it should be obvious why powerful institutions prefer racist divisions to a united working class.

Democrat leadership won't allow Democrat legislature to vote on Medicare for All
SB561

5-24-17

“Health Care: State system would cost \$400 billion.” (May 23, A8). To quote Ronald Reagan on the Media: “there ya go again.” Reporter Catherine Ho’s ending is truthful: “It—Medicare for All--is a big political lift in a state and nation where the health care delivery system has been all about profit,” said Daniel Zingale..a former adviser to Schwarzenegger. But the headline, which derives from the rest of the article, is faked news. A Medicare for All system would cost nothing. That’s right ZERO. That’s simple logic and math. We spend twice as much per capita as any other country on Earth and on the average we get less care, less access and restrictions. Medicare would take out the profit, the marketing and the Insurance denial bureaucracy. When we use that 20% (hundreds of billions) to insure everyone unrestricted, it costs nothing.(see the research at PNHP.org). As a doc I really get tired of these endless deceptions. We have so many people in need of better access and better care. Don’t let Jerry Brown and the Dems in Sacto hide behind this ruse (or our anger at the indecent Republican agenda in Washington) while they prevent Medicare for all being passed in California.

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12-5-14: Who are the terrorists?

C.W. Nevius writes: “Now let’s be clear. The shooting of unarmed Michael Brown in Ferguson and the subsequent grand jury process was a disaster (sic) and an embarrassment (*Attacking cops isn’t protesting—it’s crime*; page C1, 12/2).” A professional writer, Nevius understands the words he uses. Take “disaster”: often a disaster involves nature’s whimsy—storms, earthquakes, avalanche, tsunamis. Of course, sometimes human behaviors contribute to disasters. People don’t slow down in a fog bank and 150 cars pile up in the Valley; or a drunken ship captain capsizes a ship. But usually disasters are neither foreseen nor willful. The recurring murder of unarmed non-combative young minority men-- like Mike Brown, Oscar Grant, Andy Lopez, Amadou Dialo--- by police is entirely foreseeable and will continue. Ex-Officer Wilson asserted on national TV that he would do the same thing again. He’s not alone. That embarrassment Nevius feels reflects his allegiance to a judicial system that cannot adjudicate cold blooded murders by agents of the State. This impunity is nothing new. Nevius’ “embarrassment” is honest, but reflects his inability to reckon with what is actually happening to our country.

Medicare for All—it's time is coming.

Carolyn Lockhead's article: ***Medicare for All proposal receives a big introduction*** (page A8, 9/14 Chronicle) is great--an important recognition of a sea change in the health care reform debate. Just the title alone is marvelous, and the text recognizes the growing public awareness that health care is a human right. Yet, reality is sometimes portrayed as more complicated than it is. The idea that Medicare for All is complex or hard to implement, belies the truth, as many of us who have been involved in health system reform over decades will attest. The obstacles are purely political. Medicare for All (not just for seniors) was President Johnson's intent in the first place. Not complicated at all, but Congress and Wall Street wouldn't allow the market to take the hit for the public good. Now, its time is coming.

The above letter was, indeed, printed 9/16/17 but only two days later a long op-ed appeared by liberal Washington Post columnist Catherine Rampell which attacked Bernie Sanders for introducing a new Medicare for All bill in the U.S. Senate. On the next two and a half pages is a letter I sent directly to Catherine Rampell criticizing her article which stood against the interests and desires of the American people.

September 19, 2017

Dearest Catherine,

I've long admired your writing: incisive, analytical, intelligent and well reasoned. Now today printed across from RoseAnn DeMoro's piece on Single Payer on the Op/Ed page of the S.F. Chronicle your "Sanderscare is all cheap politics and magic math—with no plan" challenges my belief in you—it's pale, lacking depth and certainly no match for what I believe is real or RoseAnne's commentary.

Let's start from basics: Canada had a privately financed health care system and care provision system, not unlike our own. It took only a few months once the ball was rolling to implement it, first in one province and not long after that, across the nation. Do you want to ignore that? In 1964-5 one of the most saavy politicians and pragmatic presidents this nation has had (LBJ) thought it wasn't a big deal or just smoke and mirrors when he proposed Medicare for All. He couldn't get it through Congress and only got an insurance program for Seniors, but that was politics and Wall Street and mostly Republican resistance that stopped him from getting the whole deal. For half a century Medicare worked well at 3.5% overhead (vs 20-30% private insurance overhead) until the market gamed the US government into allowing Private Insurers to set up Advantage programs that will eventually bankrupt Medicare by creaming off the healthiest patients and yet charging the government 105% of regular Medicare costs. Obama did nothing to reverse that, though he made very public promises to do so.

After the Civil Rights, anti-Vietnam War resistance and essentially a cultural revolution of the 60s and early 70s, a group of doctors who had been involved in those struggles through the Medical Committee for Human Rights, led by (recently deceased) Dr. Quentin Young of Chicago, decided to take a different tack and set up the Physicians for a National Health Program (PNHP) as a single payer research and educational organization. That group today has about 21,000 dues paying physician members and has been advocating for Medicare for All for over 30 years. More importantly, it's lead policy researchers—Steffie Woolhandler and David Himmelstein (plus many younger physician researches)—have published enough peer-reviewed data, fact and evidence-based policy studies and analyses to fill several books. They have published in every major prestigious medical journal, public policy and health policy journal in the US. No one has been able to refute their work. And they are the source of many of the quotes about the efficacy and ease of transition and funding reorganization that are heard from single payer advocates. One of PNHP's senior analysts, Dr. Don McCanne reviews, worldwide, the literature on health care reform daily and puts out a newsletter that reaches thousands of people (you might consider joining his list. It's free).

Let me pose some questions to you. Are you somehow unaware of their work—which has also included numerous appearances on popular TV programs and panels? Are you somehow unaware of the web site: PNHP.org where their work and that of others is regularly updated and detailed? Are you unaware that one reason why most Medicare for All bills (state and federal) do not detail the funding mechanism is so that the opposition cannot attack the concept itself by misrepresenting a particular funding mechanism when there are many ways to skin that cat, and of course creating the details is the legislatures' job: i.e. to figure out which reallocation and

mixing of funding sources is least politically infeasible is something that can be done in the reconciliation process of a bill that passes both houses? (You imply that various funding mechanisms are all infeasible or detrimental to someone, but that's just cynicism). Are you unaware that as the biggest spender the US outpaces every single government in the world in per capita expenditures for health care by at least a factor of 2, and we even spend more public money on health care than anyone else. Thus, funding a US Medicare for all system that eliminates private insurers isn't the problem. The problem is figuring out how to shift the existing money around--from a, b and c to one fund without goring too many oxen. That requires putting the reform resisters in Congress (of both parties) on the spot by getting the public involved in pressuring for the change. That isn't a financing problem. It's a political problem for us all. Why do you abdicate any role in the process by blaming Sanders? Every journalist, and there are many, who seeks to undermine and ridicule Medicare for All acts like it is a funding problem, thus blunting the movement rather than supporting it. Yet the Media intentionally confuses these distinct issues. Deciding on the best funding mechanism is an issue but the costs are not; and writing that hospitals will go out of business because Medicare payments are too low is ridiculous hyperbole. Do you think DHS is going to allow that to happen? And why do you believe that private insurance payments to hospitals are generous? The only ones who pay high hospital costs are the uninsured who get gouged with bills far exceeding what any insurers pay--and they wind up in debt for the rest of their lives. Hospitals are constantly at war with private insurers for too low reimbursement, just like the rest of us. Moreover, controlling federal costs with an all inclusive public insurance is going to do something else our country urgently and immediately needs: stopping excess cost inflation, thus stabilizing the % of GDP now dislocating the economy at 17.9% and rising.

No doubt, moving to Medicare for All and shutting out the Insurance industry (and that means Wall Street) will cause major changes in the U.S. economy overall, but they are changes that are not only overdue, but are necessary and inevitable, with or without Medicare for All—just witness the wealth discrepancy, the housing problems and growing homelessness, the fact that basic manufacturing and coal mining are not going to come back as major U.S. industries--to say nothing of climate and environment and all the socio-cultural crises that are threatening our quality of life. At least tackling this from the health care end on the "human right to health care" will block the efforts of the Extremist Right to make every reform seem to be about "liberal" or "socialists" ideology. When they are allowed to do that they can successfully block any and all reform efforts intended to stabilize our nation. That leads to a dead end, and ultimately know-nothingism prevails which causes the shift to fascism and repression.

I do want to believe that your talking points and briefing book derive only from your simply paying attention to system defending pundits (not from the Industry) and that you are thus naïve about how easily we can transform our system. In the 80s I spent time as a Public health Officer, then as Medical Director of a number of programs and systems (such as the Center for Elders' Independence, the PACE program in Oakland, CA -1992-2001). I've practiced medicine for 46 years. I have a Masters in Public Health epidemiology from Cal/Berkeley. I've toured the U.S. and California with other similar docs advocating for Medicare for All. I have written hundreds of letters (one published this week is attached) and attended dozens of protests at our State Capitol and of course I'm not alone, just one of hundreds of other doctors—among the 55% of physicians who have said they support a federal national insurance for all. From my vantage,

the title of your article and its cynical slant are a slight to those who have invested time, energy and their lives in health care policy and system reform, by making it seem that it's the advocates (like Sanders) who are disingenuous rather than those who would see tens of millions bereft of access to care. Your comments, in my reading, are a crass underestimation of both our commitment and our understanding of the issue of health care system reform.

If there is one thing that the ascendancy of Donald Trump and his white supremacist minions ought to have taught us all, it is that the public won't any longer abide the "do little or nothing middleground" that Democrats have settled for in recent decades. People really do need solutions to their real problems. For tens of millions, the middle ground has disappeared, lost its pillars of support now and it is disappearing into history only to be replaced either by a movement for rational and real social progress or else war, ignorance, want and intolerance. We can have Medicare for All and, if we don't destroy ourselves first, we will have it pretty soon. But we do need your support for the movement and this article was surely not that.

Be well,

Marc Sapir

2-2014

"Climate Outlook Grows Bleaker" (Chronicle Editorial, 4/2/14), so why not throw a few more wars on the fire. The Media, certainly not for the first time, is urging the US (and NATO) toward war in the Ukraine confrontation with Russia. To wit see page 2: "NATO allies to bolster eastern defenses" where we read that "On Tuesday, an estimated 35-40 thousand Russian troops equipped with...remained positioned near the border with Ukraine, a NATO military official said, speaking on condition of anonymity because of the sensitive nature of the information." Of course "remained" gives away the obvious that nothing has changed. The editors at AP and the Chron know well that we have heard about this weeks ago and so there is nothing newly provocative, newsworthy or "sensitive" here. That's hype, subtle but actual, yellow journalism to raise the public temperature over a static, if not exactly stable situation. It is US forces that are now being deployed outside the US to Russia's borders. And that requires this hypnotism. Yes, I agree: "climate outlook grows bleaker," and you can quote me on it.

12/10/15

If Debra Saunders were a canary in a coal mine, her column on Donald Trump (12/10/15) might herald Trump's being read out of the Republican Party. The problem, as she points out, however, is that Trump might still decide to run for president as an independent. But the hidden submerged toxin hiding beneath the column is that Trump's popularity, like that of Hitler and other demagogues, has less to do with the Donald himself than with the growing underlying chaos in the dominant market culture. That culture is cultivating ruthlessness, reckless ignorance, alienation, fatalism and war with cavalier abandon. Beware the buyer.

2/9/15 Public Health and childhood immunization

The absurd lead letter in the 2/9/15 Chronicle by Michael Bauce, a fellow Berkleyan, perhaps deserved your farcical tabloid headline “Don’t trample on parent’s rights.” I remember an early American flag with that snake warning: “Don’t tread on me.” But perhaps the following Bauce sentence speaks best for itself: “the most current studies reveal that unvaccinated children are far healthier than vaccinated ones.” (what studies and by whom we might ask?). We’d be lucky to find one pediatrician or one public health expert in a hundred to agree. The statement is nonsense, no more factually based than the Ptolemaic theory of the earth-centric universe or the ranting of apocalyptics or those who claim that human activity is not causing global warming, or that women have physiologic methods to prevent rape pregnancy. Bauce’s letter is an example of the proud parading of baseless beliefs that results from politicized educational models that turn us away from critical thinking, thorough investigation and weighing of all the evidence. In just a century, immunizations and other public health measures have allowed us to end the threat of so many deadly and crippling epidemic diseases. How can anyone ignore this?

Marc Sapir MD, MPH

The letter below was printed in the SF Chronicle on 2/11/15 but the first 2 sentences were removed by them.

11-1-14 National Self Immolation

“Pike County District Attorney.Rymond Tonkin...said he would seek the death penalty....” (...arrest of ambush suspect—by Eric Frein. AP byline, p A10 SFChronicle, Nov1). Long ago the Greeks, through the plays of Aeschulus, recognized retribution as a dangerous human trait; it’s not just the endless blood-letting, but the social chaos and decay that it promotes.

A strong argument against the death penalty is that, like our penal system in general, it’s applied unequally. Enough convicted murders are not even guilty of the crime. Over 140 on death rows have been exonerated in recent years. We do imprison and execute innocents. Our drone bombing presidents promote this “get-em” approach too.

However, the deeper problem—social collapse—is more central even than the moral issues. Adult abusers are disproportionately drawn from the group of past abused kids. The insane retributive ethic brought to this country by the Cotton Mathers and perpetuated as a national ethos fosters and reproduces the most violence victimized nation on earth, internally. The self-righteousness attached to the retributive mind set serves as justification for the destruction and

domination of other nations also. Our heroes are the “good-guy” killers. But it is we who already suffer the auto da fe!

The Bait and Switch

Analyses of political candidates and office holders whether by radio, TV, or print media tend to focus on “performance value” over content. For example: Republican Mike Pence “remained calm and handled himself well” in a debate. This results in the de-emphasis of Mr. Pence’s stated policies that he would try to implement (with Mr. Trump) were they in the White House. The pundits and editors who promote superficial approaches are not necessarily supporters of Mr. Trump or Governor Pence, but they are lousy journalists who live their professional lives driven by marketing formulae. They end up, perhaps unintentionally, promoting privatization of social security and Medicare, war, outlawing abortion, mass deportations, more police shootings of unarmed Blacks, discrimination against Muslims and other fascist beliefs and measures by emphasizing “performances.” Mr. Trump’s support is based upon his performances so some will counter that performance value is what the public responds to. A simple question: Did the tabloidization of newspapers and reality-TV arise because the public demanded it or is titillating sensationalism a low cost marketing strategy to grab public attention even though it promotes blind ignorance?

11/2016: Big Money (Capitalism) uses language as a form of dominance

“Language is a virus,” sang Lorrie Anderson. An interesting thing about viruses is that although they can kill, they lack autonomy. A virus is parasitic and can’t replicate without a host’s cellular machinery. In the modern world the internationalization of language has been transformed into a particularly deadly virus. While the hosts of languages past were human culture in its remarkable intriguing variegated forms, today’s worldwide host is just money and its lingo. Karl Marx, though outdated, was quite prescient in recognizing that “Capital” (i.e. money) embodies a distinct social relationship of dominance. The reason why some of the same people who voted for Bernie Sanders who believes passionately in the general welfare of “all” could fall over backward and vote for Trump who railed against so many antagonistic forms of “otherness” is because both men blamed the insiders with power and money for our predicaments. True it is that Capital corrupts, empowers, dominates. But the foundational subtext is that money’s dominance of thought and language, its market narrative, is like a virulent virus grinding all coherent social relations—i.e. human culture-- into dust.

On 12/8 and 12/9/16 the Chronicle printed letters extolling Israel's water policies as a model that California should follow. What these letters did not point out is that the largest aquifer of fresh water in that parched region sits under the Occupied West Bank Territories, where most Palestinians live. That water has been expropriated by the Israeli government and supplied to the illegal Israeli settlements and to Israel proper by Israel's Water Company at 1/5 the price that it is sold back to the occupied destitute Palestinian people in their millions. Senator Feinstein's sell out of our rivers and environment to big Ag in the Senate yesterday pales in comparison.

11-28-16 Colin Kaepernick

The media, including the Chronicle sports section, continue their slimy attack on Colin Kaepernick. Kaep's enlightened and courageous stand for justice and the rights of all of us, especially, but not only, African Americans is fantastic. His recent assertions about Cuba are incontestable on fact. Their free all-inclusive health care, their medical research, and their free educational institutions are marvelous, as those who have seen, studied or experienced them can attest. The anti-communist former owners of Cuba under US rule and US backed dictators are still able to rally enough followers, on the death of Fidel, to make noise. So what! That is hardly justification for the vilification of Kaepernick. One wonders how the Media is so effective at panning and isolating a sincere Kaepernick, yet all their "exposures" of Mr. Trump's disingenuous, dishonest and outrageous behaviors had only the effect of helping him get elected. The difference is something to marvel at.

In reflecting on the **Keystone XL pipeline** vote Charles Davis (letters Nov 20) writes: “Why build the pipeline and risk environmental harm if the refined oil is going to be exported?” Perhaps he knows the answer is self-evident-- so long as Capitalism’s needs (to sell Canadian shale oil in this case, or profitability in general) remain the political driver of most policy, this country—and others-- will feed those needs, continue to fall into chaos, conflagration, climate and social collapse, moral decay and anarchy. Gobble, gobble. They’ll eat us for Thanksgiving like Soylent Green. Surely any rational species would find a way to shut down governments whose first priority wasn’t the general good and the survival of the species, but maybe we aren’t. The uncontrolled concentration of wealth and power coupled with impoverishment, racism and blaming the powerless belie the falsity of the oft heard claim that we are the most democratic of cultures. And when we hear officials say we have to go to battle for American interests, let’s always ask ourselves “which Americans?”

11-8-14 About Iran

Writing by committee is always problematic but the Chron's editorial: "A needed overture to Iran", is flagrant. Yes, cooperation with Iran is needed. Yes, religious states (regardless of which religion they are based on) tend to undermine democracy and human rights. But we can't expect to solve big problems with distortions of reality, either. For example: "Few topics invite more ridicule than the notion of(a) deal with Iran, which hid its nuclear research for years along with violent history of undercutting the United States." There are grains of truth in that statement but it's largely an undermining of your purpose. There is still no evidence, only surmises and extrapolations that Iran's aim was a nuclear weapons program. And that "violent history of undercutting the U.S."? The historical record is clearer than your editorial writers: the US/CIA overthrew Iran's secular and popular leader in 1953 and then backed Shah Reza Palavi's dictatorial rule. After the Ayatollahs took control of the revolution in 1979 the U.S. supported Sadaam's invasion of Iran, including his use of chemical warfare. A million died. Whose "violent history" is that? Your distortion weakens your own headline and purpose.

In the news--:"YEMEN: West's envoys shut embassies, flee from rebels" (A5 World News, 2/12/15) we again see the U.S. backing Saudi Arabia's ruthless dictatorship's support for Al Qaeda (a policy that will lead to world war III). The U.S. stokes the flames of war throughout the region by allying with and helping to create and then supply both sides of every conflict--including Al Qaeda, ISIS their predecessors and their allies--intensifying dormant hatreds, meanwhile forever supporting Israeli apartheid against 7 million captive Palestinians.

When we (in the U.S.) do achieve the public release of the 28 redacted pages on Saudi Arabia from the 9/11 panel's report (now being demanded by many inside Congress and outside) we will likely see evidence that, from Bush right on through Obama, U.S. policy is insane, providing direct and indirect war support for fundamentalist jihadists and ruthless dictatorships in order to foment the collapse of "labeled" enemy nation states and movements (such as Iran, Syria, and don't forget Cuba, Venezuela, Russia) even when those labeled states show an open willingness to collaborate and opt against wars. U.S. policy thus endangers the future of human civilization.

12-19-14 Cuba and the U.S.

Like the Chronicle's Editorial Board, millions of people all over the world and the people of Cuba, I am pleased that President Obama has restored diplomatic relations with Cuba. I note also the joyous celebrations in La Habana by the Cuban people in response to the release of 3 imprisoned Cubans.

However, unless my reading comprehension has become severely attenuated, I also note that government representatives, pundits and media sources all persist in the idea that the aim of the U.S. government remains the overthrow of the government of Cuba (using carrots, more than sticks). Cuba has for decades sought a rapprochement with the U.S. and the U.S.' persistent efforts to isolate and destroy Cuba caused what-- the U.S. being isolated diplomatically (with yearly UN General Assembly unanimous votes demanding that the U.S. ends its Cuba embargo). Finally the U.S. has decided that this cold war needs to end, but instead of soft pedaling the rhetorical attacks on that small nation-- which is no threat to anyone but which helps promote the health and wellbeing of many nations through its altruistic health care system--the assumptions, the rhetorical bombast and the hubris here remain intact. Too bad.

1-28-15 Herd Immunity

Regarding the chiropractor herd-immunity-denier whose letter was published 1/28/15, this: Measles is a potentially deadly disease (in a not well nourished population in the Faroe islands it killed one in four people in the 19th century, and today it is a particular threat to people with HIV or Tuberculosis, the aged or others with respiratory diseases making them susceptible to pneumonia).

Measles can sometimes infect the brain, causing encephalitis, and is one of the most infectious of viruses spread by droplet infection. About 90% of exposed people will become infected if they are not immunized. There have been no major measles outbreaks in the U.S. in many decades because of the high levels of pre-school age childhood immunization. In counties where the immunization rates are above 90%, outbreaks are unheard of. That is the result of the herd effect—surrounding susceptible people with those who cannot transmit the infection. Moreover, the MMR immunization also protects pregnant women from exposure to the R (Rubella—german measles) a disease which is milder for most of us but which can cause serious permanent defects to unborn fetuses. This is basic factual public health information that everyone needs to know.

Why Genetically Modified Foods are Dangerous

In the article on Monsanto (pC1 Business 3/4/15), Thomas Lee manages to conflate 3 pairs of issues only tangentially related, cleaning Monsanto's image.

First, though there is no good evidence that genetically modified foods are dangerous for human consumption, the damage that such plants and animals do to other crops, the environment and the balance of the biosphere is a serious problem based on a wealth of ag experience and research data. For example, some gmo products have proven less adaptable to environmental change, while at the same time cross fertilizing and weakening more hardy natural crops.

Secondly, all giant corporations must produce some socially useful or beneficial products or they would go bankrupt. It's absurd to talk about the "good" scientific products and research of Monsanto as if that negates or neutralizes the huge detrimental down-side of "whatever the market will bear" approach—indifference to long term outcomes.

Third, the conflation of people who "distrust science" (like the immunization deniers) with people who distrust corporate ruthlessness in the way science and technology are often used to do harm for profit is obnoxious. The mind-set of this article is one cause of the distrust of science that Lee and I eschew.

3-14-15 US on Human Rights

Regarding the announcement that the "Gulf states" and the U.S. (in the person of Secretary of State Kerry) have promised to shore up the failing economy of Mr. Sissi's tyrannical military rule in Egypt (Chron 3/14/15): Backing a government that would condemn hundreds of people to death in multiple mass political trials betrays the duplicity of the U.S. stand on Human Rights elsewhere. Is there any wonder that more and more people and nations around the world distrust the U.S. behaviors and intentions?

6/12/17 Medicare for all; all good except the false rhetoric

A spate of Op/Ed pieces has appeared in major newspapers deriding “California dreaming” idealism because our Senators dared to pass SB 562 last week. But all SB 562 does is create a State Medicare insurance program (and card) for each of us that will pay for all health care, unrestricted. Three points: 1) Medicare has been around over 50 years and it’s done a pretty fair job for seniors at a low 3% administration cost. SB 562 will improve on it by eliminating all deductibles and co-pays and will end Insurance restrictions on consumers and providers 2) Medicare already covers the sickest and by far most expensive segment of the population--seniors. Adding the rest of the public is not a financial problem, and 3) Today most Americans want Medicare expanded, so these Op/Eds are directed at the Democrat politicians—warning them that if they won’t defend Insurers and Banking profit Interests, campaign money they depend on may walk elsewhere. Let your Assembly person know where you stand. They need to hear it.

Jackie Grant of Walnut Creek (Insight letter 6/18/17) was a Medicare for All (Single Payer) supporter until Kaiser (her provider of care) said Single Payer will eliminate Kaiser, but it's not true. Kaiser is a two headed organization—a giant Insurance organization and a comprehensive care provider. If Jackie had a Medicare card that provided for 100% of her health care she could continue to get all her care from Kaiser. Kaiser management does not like the fact that they would lose the control of the financing they currently have. Nationally, Advantage plans have been able to suck 5-10% more out Medicare than the government has allocated for Medicare and supplementary plans also cost people out of pocket. Kaiser management doesn't want to lose the money they use for expanding their market share. Kaiser's threat to close if they lose that is a form of blackmail. Nothing about Medicare for all would prevent Kaiser from remaining the excellent service provider that they are today.

Jonah Goldberg's Op/Ed (Government care and health 5/31/17) takes a fact well known in medicine and epidemiology (that social determinants are very important factors in health, wellness, illness and longevity) and turns that onto its head into a bizarre argument to de-legitimize the right to access health care (also housing, education, job opportunities). No libertarian or rightist will dare say that Medicare for the Elderly has little value to our people, so instead they come up with this work-around logic. But the bottom line is that equal access health care in every humane country is considered a human right; surely everyone here should have Medicare, period.

The ascension of the class bully and rip-off artist of the century to the Presidency is, for me, not more disheartening than the ideologically driven logic of the Goldbergs and the "Government isn't the answer" crowd--what that says about our nation—a nation, a culture, an electoral system gone completely array, based upon deception, profitability, disenfranchisement and barely disguised eugenics?

