ARKANSAS' WANTS AND NEEDS, ARKANSAS' PRIORITIES,
DECEMBER 2, 2008, for a Culture of Peace, Compiled by Dick Bennett

Our leaders like transportation and wars. XNA is supposed to be increased by a new concourse, new runway, and new approach highway to cost, thanks to inflation, a continuously increasing millions of dollars. XNA will even receive $3.3 million for a secondary (temporary) landing strip "so repairs can be made to the runway without disrupting flights" (ADG 9-17-08). And the Rogers Airport received $1.5 million to help pay for a new taxiway. Meanwhile, what is the main priority for the trucking industry? "New legislation to boost spending on U.S. roads, highways and bridges is the most important initiative for the trucking industry...." ("Trucking Industry States Priorities," TMN, 10-7-08). Was there debate over these wants, compared to state needs, and especially in the context of the enormous quantity of CO2 produced by planes and trucks?

The majority of Fayetteville citizens voted to raise $110 million from sales tax increases. $42 million went to excess costs from the Sewer Project, $2.1 million for trails. So that left $65.9 million for transportation--specifically, a "flyover" bridge to connect northbound College Avenue traffic to the westbound Fulbright Expressway. With too little public discussion, decisions are made and moneys are allotted to highways. Leaders seem to take for granted the first priority of roads. ("Event Showcases Expressway...." NAT 10-31-08). Now the editorial board of the NAT (11-12-08) urges action on the flyover: "It's important to get behind city leaders and support what will be a costly effort to make access to the shops and restaurants immediately north of the Fulbright Expressway less cumbersome."

What? Immediately north? Was that what the bill declared? We voted to favor one group of businesses by making access to them less burdensome and clumsy? To create a new exit ramp into the Kohl/Target area? Those who voted for the money felt that the present traffic situation in the Mall area was such "a barrier to free and convenient movement" that they would spend millions of dollars to provide improved convenience? Would the majority have voted for raising their taxes if the bill had been worded specifically and factually? We can only guess.

But I believe the vote would have been negative had the full community implications been revealed. What were the contexts when the public voted to spend money on transportation instead of on other priorities? Were the other priorities present? If you voted money for this, what will happen to that? And which is more important? Let's be specific.

CONTENTS

Arkansas Needs
"Budget Woes Plague Local Government," TMN (11-1-08, editorial).
Animals
Children (see: education, these needs interlink)
  Foster care, etc.
Economy (and P&H)
Education
  Head Start, class sizes, dropouts,
Health, Medical
  Drugs, dental, mental, etc.
Poverty, Homelessness


ANIMALS
--The city's animal shelter is full of dogs, puppies, cats and kittens and the Prairie Grove Police
Department is asking people to take one (or more) home. "Animal Shelter Seeks Homes" TMN (11-26-
08)
--"Overbudget Free Spay/Neuter Program Suspended." NAT (10-8-08). Washington County.

CHILDREN
--"Children are top priority" ADG (11-19-08). We need bold reform to help all our children reach their
potential. 1. We need to fully fund Head Start programs. 2. We need to reduce class sizes or grant
more money for two teachers in each classroom. 3. A plan needs to be chosen that gives teenagers that
drop out of school a second chance.

ARKIDS
"ARKids First Was a Good Start, But Needs Expanding." ADG (10-26-08). "Arkansas families are
struggling to pay for health care. The consequences for children are dramatic."

FOSTER CARE
"Overseer: Need State to Help Fix Foster Care: $15 million More Necessary." ADG 11-13-08. More
money needed a year to help hire more caseworkers and reduce the caseloads from 30 to 22.
--"Tightrope: Does Arkansas Have Too Many Children Living in Foster Care?" NAT (6-13-08).

ECONOMY
"Recession: Manufacturing Hits 216-Year Low," TMN 12-2-03. "Unlike past recessions, consumers
are bearing the brunt of this one. Clobbered by job losses, hard-to-get credit, and hits to their wealth
from sinking home values and plunging portfolio investments…." 

EDUCATION
--"Beebe releases education plan; Fund would total $2.68 billion" ADG (11-19-08)
--"Plan to raise retired teachers' benefits on hold till January" ADG (11-25-08) System officials estimate
that the proposed increase would cost the system about $19.5 million in the fiscal year that will start
July 1.
--"List of Troubled School Districts in State Grows to 25; LR Added." ADG (11-14-08).
--"Day Cares Suffering As Money Tightens." TMN (11-9-08).
"Beebe Says School Money Difficult to Find." TMN (10-16-08).
"Officials Target Achievement Gap." TMN (10-28-08).
--"Gearhart: Campus Requires Repairs…$215 Million Needed." TMN 11-22-08. "Replacing the
deteriorating buildings would cost $1.5 billion."

HEALTH, MEDICAL
ADDICTION TREATMENT

"Treatment advocates support increased taxation on alcohol" *NAT* (11-30-08)

From Bonnie Cook: "article in Sunday's Northwest Arkansas Times. Advocates for substance abuse and treatment say more money is desperately needed so more people can receive treatment. Senator Prichard estimated that only 17,000 out of 250,000 people needing treatment are receiving treatment. There is a proposal to put a 5% tax on liquor to pay for treatment. It is estimated drug addiction costs state agencies $349 million dollars each year. It does cost money to keep people in jail. What better way to get money to treat people by letting the people who contribute to the problem help pay for it. Never doubt that they have a strong lobbying group. Your letters help so PLEASE write or call legislators throughout Arkansas. It will take a lot of letters to get anything passed. My note will go to our State Legislators here. I'm going to send to other Legislators all over the State. PLEASE help and keep a record of how various Legislators vote on issues important to you." (12-2)

"Expand anti-drug services, state told" Only 17,500 of 250,000 people who need treatment get it said Sen. Bill Pritchard. *ADG* (11-22-08)

"3.6 Million Requested for Drug Court." *TMN* (11-19-08).

DENTISTS/DENTAL CARE

--There's a shortage of dental professionals in Arkansas. A Center for Dental Education at UA for Medical Sciences is proposed. Carolyne Park, "Lawmakers Urged to OK Dental-Training Center," *ADG* (10-7-08).

--Lawmakers urged that state revenue be found to begin Medicaid adult dental coverage. Elderly constituents have complained that diseased teeth have spread infection through their bodies.

"Legislators: Must fund dental care, end child-support fees" *ADG* (11-25-08)

HEALTH CARE WORKERS

"Report...Northwest Arkansas Official Says Local Problem is Shortage of Health Care Workers." *TMN* (Nov. 25, 2008): even if all children were insured not enough health care workers exist.

MENTAL HEALTH

"Mental Health Plan Dies in Committee," *TMN* (12-2-08) A legislative panel balked at using state money to make up for cuts in federal funding for school-based mental health programs.

NURSES

"Demand Rises, But Classroom Space Tight." *TMN* (10-5-08, 1D).

PRE-NATAL CARE, PREMATURE BIRTHS

--"Prenatal programs help low-income women in region" *NAT* (11-23-08) Kathy Grisham, executive director of the Community Clinic said the "big picture" is that 80,000 people in Northwest Arkansas are without access to health care and are uninsured.

--"Premature-birth rate earns Arkansas an F" *ADG* (11-12-08) Arkansas ranked 36th in the nation, 13.4% of its babies being premature according to the latest data available from 2005.

UNINSURED CHILDREN

"Report: 66,000 Children Uninsured," *TMN* (11-25-08). ".one out of every 11 children in Arkansas is uninsured."

POVERTY AND HOMELESSNESS

--A quarter of people in NWA live in poverty and they are increasing. More than a thousand are homeless "with 50 percent of them younger than age 18." "Report: Life Good for Most in Area," *TMN* (10-30-08).

--"Christmas Card Donations Can Make Difference, Social Workers: Economy results in more students in need, Homeless" *TMN* (11-27-08) We have 124 homeless kids right now in our district, and it is definitely up from this time last year.

--"State's Food Banks, Local Pantries Need Help" *MN* (11-26-08) Food banks and local pantries all
around Arkansas are reporting increased demand for food assistance, often from people who have never before asked for help.

THE CONTEXT NEVER MENTIONED
Where are the wars? Not only Iraq and Afghanistan, but the almost unceasing wars—what some commentators refer to as the permanent US war—since the beginning of WWII? The wars are never mentioned by our leaders and media reporters in their assessments of Arkansas needs and priorities. Yet had our leaders not invaded Afghanistan and Iraq (unconstitutionally and callously) we would be able to afford all of our needs. While Joseph Stiglitz and Linda Bilmes were writing The Three Trillion Dollar War: The True Cost of the Iraq Conflict, they discovered more and more hidden costs, until they concluded the war would actually cost $5 trillion."(p. 31). But We, the People never agreed to these imposed wars in thoughtful comparison with our true needs. Our leaders, driven by lust for power and nationalist zeal, thrust them quickly upon us with massive, multifarious deceptions: lies, myths, ideology, propaganda, secrecy, censorship. And the result? Fear. H. L. Mencken described it long ago: "The whole aim of practical politics is to keep the populace alarmed (and hence clamorous to be led to safety)…" How much more true that is when wars are created to make the fearful public think their rulers will guarantee security. "War is the parent of armies," James Madison wrote; "from these proceed debts and taxes; and armies, and debts, and taxes are the known instruments for bringing the many under the domination of the few…." And for making us, unnecessarily, unable to provide adequately for the needs of the people of our state.

(If you would enjoy carrying on this newsletter yourself, contact Dick. A note about my method: I clip from newspapers and then categorize the clippings. This method does not guarantee a complete categorical survey. What needs are not reported? Nor did I include more than half of the clips I gathered during the past few months. The subject cries out for a major study. And to students: here are resources for many papers and talks on the needs themselves, how the leaders deal with them, and how they are reported by our media.)

THESE ARE SOME OF OMNI'S VALUES: A WORLD FREE OF VIOLENCE AND WARS, A SOCIETY WITH LIBERTY AND JUSTICE FOR ALL, A CARING COMMUNITY WHERE EVERY PERSON'S POTENTIAL MAY BE FULFILLED, AN EARTH RESTORED. GRASSROOTS NONVIOLENCE, WORLD PEACE, HUMAN RIGHTS, SOCIAL and ECONOMIC JUSTICE, ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP PROTECTING SPECIES AND THE EARTH. Read our brochure and our newsletters, attend our Steering Committee, become an active member of one or more of our committees, participate in our dozens of activities to see how these broad goals are realized in action. There is nothing vague about Building a Culture of Peace, but plenty of commitment.