OMNI NEWSLETTER CONTINUING SERIES ON ARKANSAS’ TRUE NEEDS, January 26, 2012, BUILDING A CULTURE OF JUSTICE for PEACE, Compiled by Dick Bennett

Here is the link to all OMNI newsletters:

http://www.omnicenter.org/newsletter-archive/

My method has the advantage of being empirical (I cite newspaper articles), but many, actually countless needs are missing And no newspaper points out the ravenous military monster so indifferent to our needs.

US EMPIRE VS. US NEEDS
I have written some eight reports on Arkansas’ needs. In retrospect I am struck by the complete absence of recognition that a major cause of the shortage of money for health, pre-and post-child care, trauma centers, and on and on, is the permanent wars our leaders have forced us into. A striking example of this on a national level was demonstrated in TMN 2-9-10 on the same page—an article on juvenile justice and one on victim compensation. The first made a persuasive case for the need for juvenile jails, the second for financial assistance to victims of crimes. The authors of both (AP writers) seemed oblivious to the connection of the enormous war expenditures and the under-funding for these two important needs. We see the same failure by our officials and the mainstream media to connect the empire’s expenditures and local shortages in all other social needs.

GLOBAL WARMING AND CLIMATE CHANGE
Similarly, our officials are not making plans for the dire effects of extreme weather, refugees, agricultural zone changes produced by climate change. Among Arkansas’ Needs should be an increase in the county emergency budgets and staffs and staff education.

ROADS? DO OUR NEWSPAPER EDITORS UNDERSTAND THAT NOT ROADS BUT THE QUALITY OF THE LIVES OF ARKANSANS SHOULD BE OUR CHIEF PRIORITY?

(Here’s an editorial from a 2010 NWA Newspaper. Not a mention of the oil crisis affecting the Gulf, not a mention of Light Rail alternatives for NWA. Just more roads like petro is never ending. If anyone needs Light Rail info I'm sure Art Hobson would help out. LW)

population to be 691,000 by 2035. No mention of alternatives, of CO2 and climate change, of protecting earth, forests, and species. The authors of a study by Parson Brinckerhoff sound like they think time stopped in the 1950s.

The boosters of that study have the Highway Booster Commission with Commissioners like Dick Trammel, also actually living in the 1950s, who declared “interstate expansion essential to economic growth.” Tom Sissom, “Trammel Pitches Highway Plan.” NAT (3-20-11).

There’s been no letup by highway, CO2, and asthma boosters since the end of WWII. For example, a report by The Road Information Program, a DC-based transport org. that lobbies for highway funding, urged Arkansas “to spend more to improve roads and bridges.” Aprille Hanson (ADG 6-9-10).

I could write a dozen newsletters about this just about the pressures for roads during the past few years: the $500 million Springdale northern bypass, the $442 million for Benton and Washington counties, the $250 million to start the Bella Vista bypass. Richard Massey, “Money Is There for Road Projects.” ADG 12-19-10.

See Art Hobson, “Highway Funding Winding Road.” NAT (7-11-10).

HOW WE SEE IT Slow Going On Roads
WHAT’S THE POINT? The wait for the state or Congress to address our road needs looks like a long one.
Sunday, June 27, 2010

The Arkansas Blue Ribbon Committee on Highway Finance recently announced it would not meet its deadline, set by law, of coming up with a recommendation by July 1.

Later, the co-chairmen of the special committee announced their expectation to have a final report in time on Dec. 1 – too late, as a practical matter, for the Legislature to act in the next General Assembly. That convenes Jan. 1.

Anyone expecting us to criticize them today will be surprised. We take this difficulty with coming up with a final report as a sign – a very bad sign – that the committee and other interested parties are having great difficulty reaching a consensus on how to pay for roads.

There appears to be no tax proposal a majority of Arkansans would vote for, no transfer of existing revenue the Legislature or governor would approve and no new method of distributing existing money the
Highway Commission will consent to.
On top of all this, a great deal of our tax money and a big share of our nation’s financial credit goes to Washington already. The committee is tasked with finding a way of extracting more from what the taxpayers have left.
The 18-member committee has held meetings for a year. Act 374 of 2009 puts the committee in charge of defining an adequate system to pay for improvements on state highways, county roads and city streets. The committee was supposed to have submitted its recommendations to the governor and others by July 1. Fortunately for them, the law contains no penalty for missing that deadline. A tentative goal of the committee has been to find $200 million in new funding.
We’d have more confidence in plans to take growth in state revenues and committing that to highways if we had more confidence in sustained growth of state revenues. We are discouraged in how national sales of new houses fell flat as soon as temporary incentives expired.
There’s also the smoldering crisis in the state’s unemployment insurance system and the uncertainty of what the federal health care expansion will do to the state budget. We deplore the lack of any priority to improving the country’s infrastructure in the federal stimulus plan, which has now come and gone to notably little effect in improving the economy.
What do we suggest? Frankly, we think the region is going to have to count on itself, and that will include tolls, at the very least. If we continue to wait on the state or federal government, it looks like we’re in for a very long delay.
The national economy, including our local one, staggers along. We’re beginning to wonder whether the first areas to recover will be the regions that do something on their own.


Local Critical Thinking about Roads:
John Brummett, “Promises, Promises,” ADG (12-29-11. Mr. Brummett opposes an additional tax to improve roads because “there is scant evidence that splendid roads enhance economic well-being.”
(On critical thinking did you read Mike Masterson’s fine essay “Challenge the Status Quo,” ADG 1-3-12?)

THE TRUE NEEDS OF ARKANSAS
Why were our needs not a top 10 story in 2011? Brenda Blagg reported the “Top 10 News List for 2011.” Most of these events are important, but none is as important as OUR NEGLECT of people statewide year after year, partly the result of news priorities. And that culture of neglect extends to animals.

ARKANSAS CITIZENS FIRST CONGRESS
Annually lists 10 Priorities for a Better Arkansas, and ROADS are not
on the list. 1308 W. 2nd St., Little Rock, AR 72201.


CUTS IN FEDERAL COMMUNITY GRANTS
Joel Walsh, “Programs May See Cuts.” NAT (6-20-11). Cuts will affect mortgage payments, transportation vouchers for elderly and disabled, Big Brothers/Sisters mentoring services, etc.
Joel Walsh. “City Solicits Feedback: Administrators Brace for Cuts, Smaller Programs Next Year.” NAT (10-20-11). Affected include housing, public services, redevelopment.

POVERTY
EARLY DEATH
Aaron Sadler. “Report: Uninsured Die Early.” TMN (3-14, 2008. But Congressman Boozman, while saying “all Americans should have access to health care,” opposes universal care that would ensure all.
POOREST STATE
Brenda Bernet. “Census, Aid Requests Show Areaa’s Poverty.” (ADG 12-1-11). “...Arkansas has a higher poverty rate for all ages—18.7 percent—than the nation,1” and six counties are especially poor.
PENSION FUND
Joel Walsh. “Pension Fund Struggling.” NAT (1-24-11). Fund heded “toward insolvency.”
Kristin Netterstrom. “Homeless Aid Group Reopens in County.” ADG (5-3-11). Our area’s homes increased 36% in 2011.

JOBS
Alison Sider. “Fix Unclear for State’s Job-Aid Debt.” ADG (5-5-11). The state’s unemployment-insurance trust fund is insolvent.

INFANTS AND CHILDREN
GENERAL CHILD WELL-BEING 2008

CHILDREN AND INFANTS
MANY ARE HUNGRY.
Rose Pearce. “Low Reading Skills Tied to Poverty, Hunger.” NAT (10-20-11). “…especially in Washington County which has the greatest number of hungry children in Arkansas.”

INFANT CARE INADEQUATE IN RURAL AREAS
Brenda Bernet. “Infant Care Found Limited in Rural Areas.” ADG (12-30-12). What are parents both of whom work full-time to do? In Washington County 64.2 percent of working parents have children under 6.

CHILD FOOD INSECURITY
Brenda Blagg. “Congress Does One Good Thing.” NAT (12-5-10). Money for additional school meals was provided for 2011 (Sen. Lincoln for, Cong. Boozman against.) But the pressure must be maintained.

ASSISTANCE TO POOR CHILDREN

MORE MONEY FOR FOSTER HOMES NOT LESS
Brenda Blagg, “Budget Cuts Carry a Cost.” NAT (6-29-11).


ELDERLY
Christopher Spencer, “Seniors Put on Waiting List. Food Program Strained as Demand Grows, Costs Rise, Funds Drop.” TMN (5-5-08).

VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
DISABLED
Amy Upshaw, “U.S. to Sue 6 Centers for Disabled in State.” ADG (5-6-10). “The U.S. Dept. of Justice says Arkansas’ entire system for serving people with developmental disabilities is out of compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act....”
Amy Upshaw, “Agency Raising Care Bar at Units: Disabled Focus of Revamp Effort.” ADG (12-25-10).
Tracie Dungan, “Mental Health Support Sought.” ADG (1-24-11). For prevention program “Assertive Community Treatment,” $5.3 million requested.
Debra Hale-Shelton, “Transport of Elderly Perplexes Conway.” ADG (1-25-11). Conway can’t continue the free medical transportation.

EDUCATION  (see: Illiteracy)
K-12
Editorial. “Support Schools Above All Else.” NAT (9-2-10). Urges “the full measure of educational adequacy spending.”
Fort, Caleb. “Rogers Expands After-School Programs.” NAT (11-29-10). After school programs are popular but not generally available, depending upon grants, and are often full, too far from home, and too expensive.
Rob Moritz, “Report Says Arkansas Teacher Salary Disparity Growing.” TMN (3-8-08). E.g. teachers paid 15% less than registered nurses, computer programmers, and others in private sector. But salaries are increasing.
“State Arts Council Seeks More Money.” TMN (9-11-08).

College
Sims, Scarlet. “Colleges in State Heading to Last Place, Panel Told.” ADG (9-26-10). On failure to retain students through graduation: 37.6% vs. 54.3% national average.
Amy Upshaw, “State Gets Failing Grade in College Affordability.” ADG (12-3-08). But so did all other states except CA, and our lottery will help.

HEALTH

Swanson, Christie. “AIDS Education Waning.” NAT (12-4-11). HIV for people in their early 20s “has grown during the past five years.” Bernet, Brenda. “With More Patients, Clinic Looks to Expand.” NWA Free Health Center “at capacity.”

Bernet, Brenda. “Poor Adults Lack Health Coverage….” ADG (11-2-11). “25% in Springdale have no policy.”

“Hospice Care.” NAT (10-1-11). 256 hospice beds available in Ark.; 1,100 beds needed. 52 beds available in Benton and Washington counties; 99 beds needed.


Dungan, Tracie. “State Seeks Attainable Health Goals.” ADG (3-7-11). Ark. focuses on chronic diseases “for which it frequently finds itself near the bottom of national lists.”

Pear, Robert. “Health-care Premiums Soar as Coverage Shrinks.” ADG (3-6-11). A national report from the NYT.

Blad, Evie. “Trauma Centers Set at Three Sites.” ADG (9-29-2010). [Arkansas is making some progress; now we must sustain the new programs.]


“HIV Clinic Still Vital to Region.” NAT (6-21-10). Washington County HIV Clinic is invaluable.

“Medicaid Cuts Should Surprise No One.” NAT (2-23-10).

Dungan, Tracie. “Grants Fund New Infirmaries.” ADG (1-9-11). Nine public school districts have a “wellness-center” to improve health of students and teachers for better learning and teaching. 5 are in NWA. [It’s only 5 and only for 3 years. Selective, short-term grants are not the way to make a country healthy.]

Vu, Pauline. “States Commit Education Money to combat Nursing Shortage.” ADG (9-29-08).

Park, Carolyne. “State Looks at Shortage of Dentists.” ADG (9-20-
Ark. ranks 50th in the country “for access.”

Wickline, Michael. “Medicaid Financing Said to Be Waning.” ADG (9-5-08). 800,000 Arkansans are serve at cost of $3.9 billion.

Wiest, Jason. “Study: State Ranks 44th in Children’s Health Care.” TMN (5-30-08).

Wiest, Jason. “Experts Agree State Needs More Health-Care Professionals.” TMN (5-7-08).

ILLITERACY
Bob Schroeder, “Literacy Still a Huge Problem.” NAT (1-2-12). “...estimated that 20 percent of adults in Arkansas are functionally illiterate—meaning 583,184 Arkansans are illiterate.”

BROADBAND INTERNET UNAVAILABLE STATEWIDE
Dana D. Kelley, “Arkansas Lags Again.” ADS (10-12-10). Mr. Kelley describes the many advantages of broadband and gives stats of low possession and use by low income Arkansans.

LOCAL HUMAN SHELTERS, HOMES
“Shelters Deserve Your Support.” NAT (2011). Shelters (the editorial focuses on the Salvation Army Shelter) have more demand and less money. See NAT’s series nwaonline.com/shelter. Netterstrom, Kristin. “Pot of Stimulus Cash for LR Poor runs Low.” ADG (3-7-11). Grant for homes very poor and homeless exhausted at some agencies and will end by summer for all.

LOCAL ANIMAL SHELTERS

POLITICS, MONEY, and US EMPIRE
All of the above are inseparable from politics and who decides where the money goes. Politics decides which policy decisions keep more money flowing to military contractors and which policy results in less to contractors and services who provide housing for the poor, internet and literacy for all citizens, good health and education for Arkansas. Why does all this keep happening? We can learn why; we can learn the connections between the inequities
and the structural violence behind them. Try to name the just and legal invasion, or even the just and legal interventions the US has perpetrated during the past 60 years. Study this question. Get informed. Then focus on the cost of the military for this year: $878 billion. Break it down: that’s $28,000 a second. Tick it off. Incomprehensibly expensive, virtually permanent unjust wars, while ARKANSAS HAS MAJOR NEEDS.