

Can a greener economy help solve poverty?

By STEVE BERG

Facing up to the twin dilemmas of our times — high energy costs and global warming — will require a new kind of economy: a greener economy. And if this new economy is to be built, shouldn't we take another shot at the poverty problem?

Van Jones thinks we should. "A green economy should connect people who need the jobs most to the jobs that most need to be done," he told an overflow crowd at a breakfast event in St. Paul last week.

Jones, age 39 and a Yale law school grad, is the founder and president of Green for All, a Bay Area-based organization that wants to make sure that the emerging green economy includes those the waning carbon-based system has left behind. His view is that climate change and poverty should be tackled together.

Jones' approach has generated considerable enthusiasm in the Twin Cities, where a Mayors' Initiative on Green Manufacturing is already under way. His stop at a union hall here last week drew a surprising turnout of 150 — including Mayors R.T. Rybak of Minneapolis and Chris Coleman of St. Paul, as well as U.S. Reps. Betty McCollum and Keith Ellison and a half-dozen DFL state legislators.

A poverty/pollution epiphany

Later, over lunch at a Warehouse District restaurant, Jones recalled the moment of his poverty/pollution epiphany. From Oakland's toughest streets, where he worked with troubled youths, he drove often across the bay into

affluent Marin County, where the big concern was climate change and clean energy. And it struck him that caring for the earth's future shouldn't belong only to a liberal elite. The poor have a huge stake.

If kids hanging on street corners could be trained to install insulation, erect solar panels, assemble hybrid buses, operate urban tree farms or do the multitude of other green manufacturing jobs on the horizon, then America would have turned its energy-environmental crisis into a socio-economic opportunity.

"We have unfinished business in this country," he told me. "It's the business of equality and inclusion."

Jones doesn't underestimate the difficulty of that task, however.

The "war on poverty" launched four decades ago failed for a number of reasons, he said. One was that the anti-poverty bureaucracies served mostly to perpetuate themselves rather than help the needy. But a more basic problem was the disappearance of hundreds of thousands of industrial jobs, some lost to automation, others to foreign competition. Those jobs had lifted millions of European immigrants and Appalachian whites out of poverty. By the time African-Americans and newer immigrants were poised to take their turn, the low-pay service economy was all that remained. Now there's another chance.

Certain jobs can be kept at home

Not all of new green manufacturing jobs can be kept at home, he acknowledged. Japan and Germany may continue as leading

importers of wind turbines, for example. But Americans can assemble and install them. And millions of other green jobs — in building products, biofuels and transportation — must be done locally.

"It's easier to say than it is to do," Jones said. But the problem stares us squarely in the face. Stagflation has returned — the frustrating combination of high prices and fewer jobs brought on by a big run-up in oil prices. Unlike the late 1970s, however, when OPEC played games with the spigot, this latest energy crisis is real. Cheap oil won't be back. And global warming must be mitigated.

In the midst of these realities, Jones expects a monumental political showdown within the next decade over how to restart economic growth.

One option is to hold fast to the carbon economy. He calls it the "drill, burn and bake the planet" approach. That means, he said, more oil extraction in sensitive areas, more burning of fossil fuels, more deforestation, more planting of crops for fuel, more starvation abroad, more poverty at home and more denial that global warming exists.

'Invest, invent and include'

The other option is the green economy, which he calls the "invest, invent and include" approach. That means taking full account for the costs of carbon in economic decision-making. It also means investing in green technologies and training the poor to perform new green jobs.

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MINNPOST.WORLD

Even by Washington standards, McClellan's tale is a bombshell

It's hard to imagine Bill Moyers telling the public that Lyndon Johnson had it all wrong or Ron Ziegler confirming that Richard Nixon was a crook after all. Former presidential press secretary Scott McClellan's tale of White House deceit, issued while the George W. Bush is still filling a chair in the Oval Office, ranks as an astonishing turn, even by Washington standards.

By STEVE BERG

"Bombshell" is the word that comes to mind.

It's hard to imagine Bill Moyers telling the public that Lyndon Johnson had it all wrong or Ron Ziegler confirming that Richard Nixon was a crook after all. Former presidential press secretary Scott McClellan's tale of White House deceit, issued while the George W. Bush corpus is still warm and filling a chair in the Oval Office, ranks as an astonishing turn, even by Washington standards.

Most interesting on Thursday was how Bush's critics honed in on the substance of McClellan's new book "What Happened," especially the accusations that Bush and his inner circle used propaganda to "shade the truth" in selling the Iraq war, while Bush's defenders quickly shifted the focus to McClellan himself, especially his motives and character.

The Progress Report blog called it "the automatic smear response," often deployed by the White House to discredit others who have disagreed.

Karl Rove, the president's former campaign guru, compared McClellan to a "left-wing blogger."

Bush's current press secretary, Dana Perino, described him as "disgruntled" and "not the Scott we know." She said the president was "puzzled" about the book and "disappointed that if he had these concerns and these thoughts, he never came to him or anyone else on the staff."

Stabbed in the back

Trent Duffy, who worked as McClellan's deputy, said of his

former boss: "Here's a man who owes his whole career to George W. Bush, and here he's stabbing him in the back and no one knows why."

McClellan offered reasons, however. He claimed that there's a higher calling in politics than loyalty. "The White House would prefer I not speak out openly and honestly about my experiences, but I believe there is a larger purpose," he said on NBC's "Today" show. "I had all this great hope that we were going to come to Washington and change it. Then we got to Washington, and I think we got caught up in playing the Washington game the way it is being played today."

That game involves staying in a kind of permanent campaign mode that, in Bush's case, led to an "unnecessary" war in Iraq, one that McClellan labeled a "strategic blunder."

"I don't think it was intentional or deliberate," he told National Public Radio. "What happened here was we got caught up in the very thing the president campaigned against when he first was running for president back in 2000 — the destructive, partisan tone in Washington."

The administration "set up a massive political operation that was aimed at really continuing that permanent way of governing — going out and shaping and manipulating the narrative in the media to one's advantage," he said. That's the nature of Washington, he told NPR, and "that's something I think most Americans are ready for us to move beyond."

But, as Washington Post book reviewer Jonathan Yardley pointed out, there were instances in which McClellan felt deliber-



REUTERS/Jim Young

Scott McClellan with President Bush when McClellan announced his resignation as White House press secretary in April of 2006.

ately misled. His disillusionment appears to stem largely from the Joe Wilson/Valerie Plame affair in which the White House punished a war critic by revealing his wife as a CIA agent. In his book, McClellan says that he unknowingly passed along false information to the public about the matter and that was led to do so by five top officials, including the president.

Once outside the White House bubble, it was clearer to him that this had happened on other occasions as well. On Hurricane Katrina, he said the White House spent the first weeks after the devastating storm "in a state of denial."

Yardley summed it all up this way: "It is the fate of the presidential press secretary to be among an administration's most visible public faces yet to be comparatively impotent within the circles of real power. McClellan struggled with this as did all press secretaries before him, but it was his misfortune to be the spokesman for an administration in which deceit and prevarication were commonplace."

Some ironies

Many in the media were quick to point out ironies about McClellan.

"Now he tells us," writes John Dickerson on Slate.com. "Scott McClellan's memoir offers more candor in a chapter than he let

loose during his three years as the president's spokesman."

Blogger Michelle Malkin, among others, unearthed a pithy 2004 quote. When asked about Richard Clarke's critical book about the administration, McClellan had said: "Why, all of a sudden, if he had all these grave concerns, did he not raise these sooner? ... He is bringing this up in the heat of a presidential campaign. He has written a book, and he certainly wants to go out there and promote that book."

Well, four years later, it's McClellan who is promoting a tell-all book in the midst of a heated presidential campaign. Blogger John Mercurio of the National Journal offers this tidbit: "OK, one more item, which isn't a sure thing per se: Could McClellan actually support Barack Obama this fall? Talking to Meredith Vieira on 'Today,' he said he hopes his book will become part of the current presidential campaign's dialogue, and he said Obama's message of changing Washington is 'very similar to the one the president ran on in 2000.'"

Steve Berg, a former Washington, D.C., bureau reporter, national correspondent and editorial writer for the Star Tribune, reports on urban design, transportation and national politics. He can be reached at sberg@minnpost.com.

The game is afoot: a fresh spin on Sherlock Holmes

ED HUYCK

Steve Hendrickson has been preparing for his latest role since sixth grade.

That's when the actor — who has worked extensively in the Twin Cities and is an artistic associate with Ten Thousand Things Theater — first read Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes adventures. Later in junior high, he met a kindred spirit and the two amused themselves in a unique way. "Each day at lunch, we'd each write a Holmes parody. Then we'd exchange them in study hall."

So, yes, Hendrickson has done the homework — and then some — to play the master detective in Park Square Theatre's production of "Sherlock Holmes: The Final Adventure." Playwright Steven Dietz has adapted the play, originally crafted by Doyle and actor William Gillette in 1899. It includes bits and pieces of a number of adventures (most significantly "A Scandal in Bohemia" and "The Final Problem") along with original material.

The work, which won the 2007 Edgar Award for best mystery play, tightens and cleans up the original, Hendrickson says.

The work, though not part of the official canon, also helped to define the look of Holmes. For example, Holmes' long, curved pipe was first used by Gillette "so the pipe wouldn't hide his face on stage," Hendrickson says.

The closest of friends

The show also includes Holmes' longtime confidant and best friend, Dr. John Watson (played by Bob Davis), and, naturally enough, Holmes' great foil, Professor James Moriarty (played by Jim Cada).

Davis avoided the many film adaptations that have portrayed the good doctor as a bumbling fool. The man, Davis notes, was a medical doctor and a war hero (famously injured in Afghanistan, either in the shoulder or leg, depending on the story) who became Holmes' only friend.

"The play has a proper depiction of Watson — someone of supreme loyalty and patience," Hendrickson notes. "He would have to be to put with the eccentricities of Sherlock Holmes."

For many readers (including this faithful fan dating to fifth grade), that relationship is as important as the detective sto-

"Sherlock Holmes: The Final Adventure"

- May 30-June 22
- Park Square Theatre, Historic Hamm Building, 20 W. Seventh Place, St. Paul
- \$18-\$36
- 651-291-7005

ries surrounding it. The men live large enough in the imagination where it is possible to wonder where they would have ended up without each other. Watson was a wreck after returning from war. Holmes had his intense and single-minded personality, not to mention a cocaine addiction. "I imagine Holmes would have ended up burned out or dead without Watson," Hendrickson says.

The play intensifies the relationship between Holmes and Irene Adler (referred to as "the woman" in her one appearance in "A Scandal in Bohemia") and also puts Moriarty — "the Napoleon of Crime" who only showed up in a pair of stories — more in the center as a nemesis.

In Cada's mind, Moriarty is akin to Batman's Lex Luthor or the Joker — an arch nemesis for the hero. That, mixed with

the then new idea of organized crime, must have made the character live large in the minds of readers. The idea of organized crime "must have been terrifying for the Victorians," Cada says.

Interpretations aside, the actors (under the guidance of director Peter Moore) face other challenges in the show. "There is a lot of exposition and a lot of talk, so our task is to keep the show going," Hendrickson says.

Much of this falls to Davis, as Watson — naturally enough — serves as the show's narrator. "I want to make sure I don't lag in my pace, but you can't go so fast or you will lose the audience," he says.

Want to add your voice?

If you're interested in joining the discussion by writing a Community Voices article, email Susan Albright at salbright@minnpost.com.

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Joel Kramer, CEO and editor

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Jones concedes that remaking a problem population into a reliable work force carries big costs. But even if you have to spend double to train a guy on the street corner, the long-term savings are huge, he said, especially when you consider the cost of prison and the social costs consumed by the women and children left behind.

“Pay a little now or pay a whole lot later” has become a mantra for the movement.

However inevitable, no orderly transition to a greener economy is likely without a federal policy that limits greenhouse-gas emissions. The Senate will take up that formidable task next week, when it begins debating a bill sponsored by Sens. John Warner, R-Va., and Joe Lieberman, the independent from Connecticut. The bill aims to reduce U.S. global-warming emissions by 66 percent over the next four decades. Greenhouse exhausts from power plants, autos and other polluters would be reduced 2 percent per year between 2012 and 2050 based on 2005 emission levels.

The result would be a massive change in how the U.S. creates, delivers and uses energy. A price on carbon would be imposed. And an array of incentives would be offered for greener technologies.

Opposition from Bush, business

President Bush opposes the bill. Conservatives and some business groups have also objected. The American Enterprise Institute, citing a federal analysis of the bill's economic impact, estimates a 2.7 percent reduction in gross domestic product (GDP) by 2050. The article, “How Green Hysteria Will Hit Home,” called the bill's emissions targets “absurd and irresponsible.”

The Natural Resources Defense Council argues, however, that the cost of doing nothing would be far greater. Citing a Tufts University study, it estimates a 3.6 percent GDP reduction if the current course is followed. That's a \$3.8 trillion annual economic decline by 2050, expressed in 2008 dollars.

Failing to address global warming will carry \$950 billion in water costs, it says, plus \$422 bil-

lion for hurricanes, \$360 billion in real-estate losses and \$141 billion in increased energy costs.

The debate in Minnesota is a microcosm of the national disagreement. Margo Thorning, in an article posted on the website of the Center of the American Experiment, estimated that Minnesota's gross state product would decline by as much as \$12.6 billion a year by 2030 if Warner-Lieberman became law. That would mean nearly 75,000 job losses in the state and a decline in the average household income of \$8,200 a year. Electric bills would rise by 153 percent and gasoline prices would increase by 140 percent, she predicted. Meanwhile, the benefits are unknown, she said.

Retooling through a green filter

David Foster, director of Blue Green Alliance, a joint project of the Sierra Club and the United Steelworkers, doubts those numbers and says that the consequences of doing nothing would be far worse. Shifting toward a green economy is the only logical response: “Retooling all economic development through a green filter

is a good place to start,” he said.

“Minneapolis Mayor Rybak, who increasingly views his city through an environmental lens, told last week's breakfast gathering that land-use policy will be especially important in fostering a greener economy for Minnesota. Building a green manufacturing plant that requires workers to drive long distances shouldn't be encouraged, he said. “It's not really a green job if you make the job in a remote location.”

“That's one connection to Van Jones' hope that a greener economy might benefit the poor. The Mayors' Initiative on Green Manufacturing aims to “capture and grow” jobs in Minneapolis and St. Paul by “siting green manufacturing facilities on the two cities' valuable industrial land.” Much of that land is — as Jones would say — close to the people who need jobs the most.

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Rep. Nick Rahall's idea: Oberstar as next transportation secretary

By ALBERT EISELE

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Is Rep. Jim Oberstar in line to become Secretary of Transportation when a new president is sworn in next January?

He is if Rep. Nick Rahall, D-W. Va., has his way. Rahall, who is vice chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee chaired by Oberstar, said Wednesday night he will urge the next president to name Oberstar to the Cabinet position.

And since Oberstar is a superdelegate to the 2008 Democratic National Convention who was an early supporter of likely Democratic nominee Sen. Barack Obama, he would have a good shot at a Cabinet job if Obama were elected.

Rahall's comments came as

Oberstar's official portrait was unveiled at a ceremony in the committee's Rayburn House Office Building hearing room before an audience that included four previous chairmen, one of whom was Rep. Norman Mineta, who served as Secretary of Transportation under Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, and more than 100 of Oberstar's colleagues, family and friends.

The 73-year old Oberstar, who came to Washington in 1963 as an aide to the late Rep. John Blatnik, D-Minn., served as staff director when Blatnik was chairman of what was then called the House Public Works Committee. Oberstar took over the seat after Blatnik retired in 1974, and he became chairman last year.

Oberstar is the first member of Congress to serve as chairman

of a committee on which he was staff director. And, as another former chairman, ex-Rep. Robert Roe, R-N.J., pointed out, the panel is the only bilingual committee in Congress, thanks to Oberstar's fluency in French.

A smiling Oberstar

Rahall, who emceed the event, called the 73-year-old Oberstar “the true builder of America,” and declared, “This committee has done more for this nation than any other committee.”

Oberstar paid tribute to his wife, Jean, and daughter, Anne Prager, to his colleagues and aides, and to Minnesota artist Leslie Bowman, who painted his portrait over a period of eight months. Bowman, who is from Burnsville, said it is unusual for the subject of an oil portrait to be smiling, but she

chose to portray Oberstar smiling because “it looked so warm and natural.”

In an oblique reference to Roe's question about where Oberstar's portrait would hang in relation to those of Blatnik, Mineta, Roe, Rep. Don Young and former Rep. Bud Shuster, Oberstar said, “I don't worry about where my portrait goes, but maybe it'll be next to Blatnik, and in the quiet of the evening, we'll have a quiet conversation” about what Roe described as “building bridges to everywhere.”

Albert Eisele, a former Washington correspondent for the Duluth News-Tribune and St. Paul Dispatch Pioneer Press, is editor-at-large and founding editor of The Hill, a newspaper that covers Congress.

Franken 'porn' story crosses GOP-DFL barrier

By DAVID BRAUER

The long knives are officially out for Al Franken within the DFL. St. Paul Congresswoman Betty McCollum opened the floodgates Thursday when she criticized Franken's 2000 Playboy "Porn-O-Rama" parody; previously, such attacks had only come from GOP officials and blog parrots. McCollum supported Mike Ciresi, so her position is tainted. (Ciresi may yet re-enter the race). However, AP's Fred Frommer, who broke the story, noted that fellow DFL Congressmen Keith Ellison and Tim Walz "expressed concerns."

More Playboy: It's probably the first time AP has included the phrase "Minnesota Institute of Titology" in a dispatch. Ellison, who has said he'll support Franken if he's endorsed (Walz is more circumspect), offers this devastating analysis: "Can I explain it to my 11-year-old daughter? I'd have considerable difficulty." Fundamentally, Franken's writings have nothing to do with jobs, education or war, but as a wise man once told me, "If you're explainin', you ain't gainin'."

Media analysis: The Strib has run two staff-written Playboy-fracas stories in the past 10 days; the Pioneer Press has yet to have a staff writer tackle the issue. Both Strib pieces fronted the Metro section; the PiPress runs today's AP story on B5.

The Franken set-to is a nice backdrop for the state GOP convention, opening in Rochester today. The print version of the PiPress plays up a "schism" between Republican leaders and Ron Paul insurgents who feel they've been shut out of the convention. The Strib highlights GOP plans to "rebuild a legislative majority." U.S. Sen. Norm Coleman gets the endorsement of Minneapolis and St. Paul police federations; MPR's Mark Zdechlick offers a long look at Coleman's zigzagging six-year record.

Twin Cities Daily Planet's Doug McGill has an amazing

story: Tomorrow, "the primary architect of a genocide in western Ethiopia" will face members of the targeted group in Minneapolis. A locally based Anuak association invited Ethiopian provincial Gov. Omot Obang Olom, but some see it as a propaganda campaign. The Ethiopian Army killed 425 Anuak in 2003; one Anuak activist says Ethiopia is buying off immigrants with "gifts and favors." The larger media should cover this.

Mega-developer Hines Interests has secured a downtown Minneapolis parking lot for "a 1 million square-foot office tower that could rival the city's tallest buildings," the Business Journal's Sam Black reports. The lot is on Marquette between Ninth and 10th streets, next to the colorful Schmitt Music Building mural. The building would be 50 to 60 stories, and Hines says it's going "full speed" on design and marketing. Still, it wouldn't open until 2013, unless an anchor tenant quickly emerges.

Minneapolis activists often want to see local police move back to the city, but they might reconsider after this KSTP report: a block's party house is cop-rented. The Strib says two officers are now under investigation for firing as many as 10 shots as they were leaving Thursday morning. Loud, late-night events are common, neighbors say. Trying calling 911 on these guys.

Hackers took down Comcast's email service Wednesday night, the Strib's Steve Alexander writes. Service remained intermittent until Thursday night, he notes. One expert says users should change their passwords. The attack didn't affect Comcast's servers. There might be malicious software at an upper-level domain name server, however.

The PiPress's Julie Foster reports on a survey about how high gas prices must go to change local behavior. The IBM poll says 11 percent of

metro folks have already made changes; 27 percent would do so once gas tops four bucks. The number tops 50 percent when the readout hits \$4.50. Remember when we thought there'd be riots when gas topped \$3? Of the 10 cities surveyed, drivers in Atlanta, Dallas and here are quickest to change.

Same song, second verse: the PiPress's Gita Sitaramiah says used SUV prices have fallen 20-30 percent locally, and trade-ins at one dealership are up 50-60 percent.

Delta's president Ed Bastian tells the Strib's Liz Fedor that the NWA merger has been "pressure tested" with oil prices above \$135 a barrel. How high, Bastian doesn't say, but that's important given that prices are near \$135 right now. Fedor notes that oil was \$110 when the merger was announced.

Truckers want a uniform national 65 mph speed limit, WCCO's Pat Kessler reports. That's because they have to slow down to battle high fuel prices, and it's safer if everyone else does, too. But U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar says there's not enough Congressional support. She did help get the feds to investigate the commodities trading that has helped jacked up oil prices.

After Thursday's mud-truck story, the Strib's Laurie Blake has a neat story on volunteers who monitor metro wetlands. Forty volunteers take readings that determine whether to protect or restore wetlands. Gloppy but praiseworthy work.

A Minnesota federal judge has slapped down a national law allowing sex offenders to be civilly committed after their sentence ends. The Strib's Larry Oakes says that nationally, three judges have upheld the law, and two, including our own Paul Magnuson, have rejected it. The expansive Commerce Clause isn't a proper basis, Magnuson ruled.

The PiPress's Dave Orrick and Rachel Stassen-Berger write that in a mere 24 hours, the U has become more flexible about the Washington Avenue light-rail alignment. Gov. Pawlenty, via Met Council chair Peter Bell, says the U now understands "the basic question of the alignment has been settled." This would be more convincing coming from the U itself.

AP says three local lawyers will share up to \$750,000 for divvying up \$36 million in 35W bridge compensation funds. Susan Holden of the Sieben Grose firm will chair, and Michael Tewksbury and Steven Kirsch will assist.

The Business Journal reports that Nate's Clothing's former building has been sold to a Circle Pines investor. The buyer plans upscale offices with "one or two" restaurants. Nate's reopens at Edina's Yorktown Mall Monday.

The Strib notes that 14 Hennepin County libraries begin Sunday hours this week. Nine are in Minneapolis, which hasn't had Sunday hours since 2002. The new downtown library will be open Sunday for the first time.

Major bummer: This year's Art Car Parade has been canceled, the PiPress's Amy Carlson Gustafson reports. The Minneapolis celebration of auto frivolity lost its funding. There will be a drive around Lake of the Isles, though, and art cars will decorate Sunday's Grand Old Day event in St. Paul.

Nort Spews: It's all delicious in the Twin Cities. The Twins sweep K.C. 5-1 behind Kevin Slowey's complete game. (How hard is Ron Gardenhire trying to avoid his bullpen?) The Twins are three games over .500, matching their season high. The Royals have lost 11 in a row; beaten-down Sore Loser here. And congrats to the Lynx, who are off to their first-ever 3-0 start with a 75-69 win over Chicago.

COMMUNITY VOICES

Articles on Ron Paul, Mike Hatch elicit comments

Ron Paul's snubbing by the GOP, Mike Hatch's era in the Minnesota attorney general's office, persistent racism and Arne Carlson's take on this year's legislative session were among the issues prompting MinnPost readers' recent comments.

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Several readers had lengthy reactions to Craig Westover's Tuesday post, "Ron Paul plans to take his message outside GOP state convention Friday," including these excerpts:

From Matt Ehling:

These actions on the part of the Republican Party reveal an institution on the brink of ideological crisis. In rejecting the infusion of energy and ideas that Paul's supporters are attempting to bring to the party, the GOP seems to be tacitly acknowledging that its contemporary doctrines are not strong enough to drive the party's political machinery on their own merits anymore. Rather, GOP elders seem to be indicating that the party machinery must be insulated against ideological reform — even if that reform comes up through the party itself.

It remains to be seen what the GOP will ultimately decide to do. The Paul voters could be absorbed into the party structure for the long-term if they can be assured that they'll have a voice in reformulating the direction of the GOP. If not, they may schism off to the Libertarian party, in numbers that

could make or break John McCain's candidacy. ...

Jeff Urbanek's reaction:

It still blows me away (and scares me) that Ron Paul garners so much support. This is a man whose newsletter included several racist and inflammatory comments. Look on David Duke's website — see what he endorses and what he believes in. And then notice that he endorses Ron Paul as the best candidate to come along since himself. ...

Bernice Vetsch added:

Yes, Ron Paul has crazy ideas, especially about economics, but no crazier than John McCain's view that we need to stop "crippling" business with government regulation. This no doubt comes from his economic advisor Phil Gramm, who as a senator in 2000 slipped some provisions into a huge budget bill that forbade the government from regulating the financial services industry. The intended result was to allow the companies to be more "creative." The actual result was the housing meltdown that is harming both lenders and buyers here and around the world. Perhaps they got too creative without proper oversight. ...

Brian Kirscht had a different view:

It's astonishing how some people have no idea what Ron Paul is all about. Perhaps they should read his website and his book.

Crazy economic ideas? He's the only one in all of Washington D.C. that truly understands free

market economics! Government regulation in any part of the economy is a horrible idea. ... The Federal Reserve is ruining the dollar and inflation is making every single one of you poorer. ... It's time for the GOP old guard to step down and let the real, true conservatives take over and put the party back on the right path. Right now the GOP is nothing better than a bunch of Democrat liberals that want to spend us into bankruptcy. ...

And from Jonathan Kovaciny:

... The racist smears have been discredited long ago, and Ron Paul has won several congressional elections since those allegations surfaced. I am not saying that the newsletter content was excusable. I am saying that it is campaign mud that you only hear about because his opponents know it costs him votes regardless of its veracity. The fact that these allegations "surfaced" on the eve of the New Hampshire primary should give you some clue that these are politically motivated attacks.

Ron Paul is arguably the least racist person in the federal government because he does not vote for bills that grant special privileges to groups of people ("blacks", "minorities", etc.) but rather fights for the rights of the individual as outlined by the Bill of Rights. The rest of our government makes race a very big issue, asking about it in census data, offering grants to minority-focused groups, etc.

... Ron Paul did not arrive at his economic stances lightly. Rather, he has spent literally decades studying free market

economics with the likes of Hayek and Mises. Paul has written multiple books on economics, detailing why he believes what he believes. I don't think you'll find any other presidential candidates to have given even close to that much thought to economic policies.

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Joe Fleischman commented on David Brauer's May 22 post, "Strib finalizes new features section lineup":

What? No daily section devoted to "American Idol"? Never mind, that's what the front page is for.

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Patrick Donnelly appreciated Jim Walsh's May 23 post, "When Ashleigh emotes and Eller takes your breath away, how can you care what rankings say?":

God, Jim, you haven't missed a beat. Great to be reading your passionate writing again. I always said you were the best at putting music into the context of life, rather than just parsing the beats and lyrics and images of the pop stars of the day.

I read that same [USA Weekend magazine] article last weekend, suckered by the headline just like you. Funny, they didn't mention Vegas either. Can't Manilow and Cher get a little love once in a while? OK, our omission was well deserved, but I was equally stunned that MSP didn't make the cut. But like you said, those who matter already know what that scene is all about. ...

Want to add your voice?

If you're interested in joining the discussion by writing a Community Voices article, email Susan Albright at salbright@minnpost.com.