

Obama's New Appointments

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The beat goes on. As with his economic and security appointments, Obama again disappointed but didn't surprise. Without exception, his team assures business as usual, a near-seamless transition from George Bush, and not "change to believe in." His latest choices raise more cause for concern and with good reason.

Media Reaction to His Energy, Environmental and Education Team

The Nation magazine cheered for Obama from the start, glorified his election, sees in him a "sea-change of course (for) progressive-driven reform....(the) end of the Reagan era....an end of the occupation of Iraq," and a socially liberal new beginning. The magazine often hyperventilates, and it's at it again about Obama's "Green Team."

According to a December 16 Mark Hertsgaard commentary, "Leading environmentalists in Washington are ecstatic about most of (Obama's new) cabinet choices" and hail his 'Green Team' selections. A "Green Dream Team" for Gene Karpinski, president of the League of Conservation Voters. Anne Aurilio, DC director of Environment America said "It's pretty clear that (Obama's) picks represent a 180-degree change in terms of what direction they're going to be heading on critical issues facing the country."

Joseph Romm, a former DOE official and current Climate Progress contributor, praised Carol Browner as a Clinton EPA Administrator and was just as enthusiastic about Steven Chu because of his views on climate change, his experience at Lawrence Berkeley Lab, and "his reported skepticism about coal's future in a carbon-constrained world."

These individuals "are three of the most tough-minded but level-headed environmentalists in Washington; their endorsements are worth heeding. And it is certainly true that Obama's green team promises a major shift in direction from what Bush and Cheney have pursued.."

Nonetheless, according to Hertsgaard, Obama's position on climate change, though far better than Bush's, is weak compared to what the EU aims for by 2020 and his view on coal is unclear. His support for so-called "clean coal" has no basis in reality. It's an industry-invented phrase about the dirtiest fossil fuel on the planet and nothing in prospect will "clean" it.

Hertsgaard gives Chu mixed reviews. He's long on "scientific credibility....seems likely to ask hard questions about coal (and says) energy is the single most important problem that science has to solve." On the other hand, "he believes nuclear power must be part of the nation's energy mix (and) supports genetic engineering and nanotechnology as possible solutions." Overall, however, Obama's picks are "more promising than those of the Clinton administration, which was long on rhetoric but short on results....In the end (he's) the

president. What he believes and desires matters (most). He respects science, understands how dangerous our present course is, and has good ideas for how to turn the ship of state around. (He) could achieve amazing things, and not a moment too soon.”

On election night, Obama said “a planet in peril” is one of the three greatest problems awaiting him and promised “a massive effort” for new green energy investment to heal the economy and environment as well as place the US in the lead on climate negotiations.

The Wall Street Journal had mixed views about his “Team to Guide Energy (and Environment(al))” issues – “a Nobel laureate, a former Environmental Protection Agency(EPA) administrator, and officials from New Jersey and Los Angeles to run his energy and environmental initiatives, putting heft into roles likely to dominate domestic policy in his first years in office.”

It mentioned his “seriousness about combating climate change....and spending heavily to boost energy efficiency and promote renewable energy. He also appears to be moving to the left,” according to Chamber of Commerce president William Kovacs by choosing “people who are committed to moving forward with regulation of greenhouse gases under the Clean Air Act, which we believe is a huge mistake.”

His Energy Secretary choice, however, “brings sterling credentials as a scientist to a job that often has gone to former politicians.” So does his Education Secretary, “a hometown friend who has introduced some education reforms popular with conservatives without alienating teacher unions....we applaud the choice.”

So did the Chicago Tribune in saying: Arne Duncan “brings to the task a decade of experience at Chicago schools, the nation’s third-largest system. (His) efforts to restructure struggling schools, experiment with incentive pay for teachers in high-poverty schools and reward students with money for grades earned him critics and champions alike.”

The Tribune is one of the latter. So is Randi Weingarten, head of the (AFL-CIO affiliated) American Federation of Teachers, who praised Duncan for “tr(ying) to do things in a collaborative way” and signaled that his union will sacrifice teachers and students to advance his reactionary agenda.

The New York Times suggested a “Hard Task (ahead) for (Obama’s) New Team on Energy and Climate” in listing “a host of political, economic, diplomatic and scientific challenges that could impede his plans to address global warming and America’s growing dependence on dirty and uncertain sources of energy.” Despite his promise to give energy issues high priority, “he must first stabilize an economy that is shedding jobs by the hundreds of thousands a month.”

In an editorial, The Times also noted that the League of Conservation Voters hailed Obama’s energy and environmental picks and called them “a Green Dream Team.” They “seem united in their concern for the threats facing the planet and unafraid to use the pricing power of the market or the financial power of government to address them.” Obama has “chosen well,” according to The Times, while noting that “nothing happens (in Washington) unless the president want it to.”

Unmentioned is his agenda’s dark side, his key campaign advisors, the forces they represent, the powerful interests directing him, a policy team to serve them, and his thus far

very effective populist smoke screen.

It's why James Petras calls him "the Greatest Con-Man in Recent History....our 'First Afro-American' Imperial President, who wins by con and rules by guns," and add guile to the mix as well. He's surrounded by Wall Street bankers, civilian and military hawks, corporate lawyers, pro-Israeli zealots, and his latest less-than-people-friendly selections. As Petras puts it: He's "the perfect incarnation of Melville's Confidence Man. He catches your eye while he picks your pocket" with foreign wars, backing corporate swindlers, and his latest picks to pursue nuclear militarism, power plants in your back yard, routine radiation discharges, cancer epidemics from them, the potential for a catastrophic accident, ending public education, and a pro-environmental smoke screen to keep wrecking it out of sight and mind.

Steven Chu

He'll become Obama's new Energy Secretary, but hold the cheers. He's professor of physics and molecular and cell biology at UC Berkeley and director of the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory (LBNL), originally called the UC Radiation Lab. He also shared the 1997 Nobel Prize in Physics with Claude Cohen-Tannoudji and William Phillips for developing methods to cool and trap atoms with laser light.

Ernest Orlando Lawrence founded LBNL in 1931. Today the Energy Department runs it and continues its radiation research. In the 1940s, it was a stealth operation with little regard for public or environmental concerns. It's much the same today. According to the Berkeley Citizen (BC) in August 2006, LBNL represents "75 Years of Science, 75 Years of Pollution." Since 2004, Steven Chu has run it, its 4000 employees, \$600 million budget, and its nuclear proliferation agenda.

BC says there's "more to science than generating new discoveries," especially when radiation is involved. "It's about taking responsibility for" research dangers, and in that regard LBNL has plenty to answer for. The "rad lab has no buffer zone between it and nearby residents and the adjacent central campus." Evaluations have flagged radiation emissions from two of its commercial user operations, the Bevatron and National Tritium Labeling Facility. They were bad enough to force their closure in the 1990s.

Other concerns relate to air monitoring given LBNL's proximity to nearby homes. There is none or scant little. The Lab operates "with a grossly outdated, long-range development plan, a fifteen-year-old environmental assessment," and refuses to consider the impact of its lab expansion, research, and harmful fallout. Overall, its attitude is "cavalier" and indifferent to the community around it.

According to BC, LBNL makes poor environmental choices and is "in crisis. With seemingly little to lose, (it's) scrambling to meet the future and reinvent itself. There seems to be very little goodwill or concern for public safety." Neither is there by its bosses in Washington. "Responsible stewardship is needed now. After 75 (now 77) years, it's about time." And for Steven Chu to assume it in his new position as DOE Secretary. Don't expect it.

He strongly backs nuclear power and called it "a necessary part of the portfolio" at the annual Stanford University economic summit last March. Yet he downplays its risks that are considerable. According to Helen Caldicott, nuclear power is dangerous and won't solve our energy problems. Each commercial reactor is an atom bomb factory. Moreover, they require

a vast infrastructure, called the nuclear fuel cycle, that uses huge and rapidly growing amounts of fossil fuels. Each stage in the cycle adds to the problem, starting with the enormous energy needs to mine and mill uranium fuel.

Then there are tail millings that need fossil fuels to remediate. Other cycle steps need them as well, including plant construction, dismantling, cleanup, handling contaminated waste, storing and transporting it. In a word, nuclear power, for commercial or military use, plays Russian roulette with planet earth, and sooner or later we lose.

It's economics also don't add up - for construction, insurance, government subsidies, and more. Add the human health toll on uranium miners, nuclear industry workers, and everyone living close to reactors or downwind from them. Plus the danger of an accidental or terrorist-caused core meltdown that some experts believe is inevitable, the waste storage problem, the need to guarantee against seepage for 500,000 years, and the threat of nuclear war and catastrophic nuclear winter that will end all human life on earth.

Chu's support for the industry is why he'll be DOE Secretary. When asked in 2005 if fission-based nuclear power plants should be a larger part of the energy-producing portfolio, he responded: "Absolutely," and elaborated with a cavalier attitude about its dangers in advocating for "recycling" of waste.

As professor of journalism and frequent writer on environmental and energy issues, Karl Grossman states: "recycling and reuse of nuclear garbage ends up spreading poisons that cause cancer, genetic damage, and other causes of premature death." Chu is "trapped (in a) nuclear mindset," according to Greenpeace USA's Jim Riccio. He downplays safe, clean renewable technologies; ignores the concerns that Caldicott and others raise; staunchly advocates for the industry; and will head to Washington to support it. He'd better or he'll be back at Berkeley and be replaced by someone who will.

Carol Browner

This writer said this about her in an earlier article. She served as Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for eight years under Bill Clinton, and held the longest ever tenure in the office. Earlier she worked for Citizen Action in Washington. Also as general counsel for the Florida House of Representatives Government Operations Committee and for Senator Lawton Chiles as well. She then was Senator Al Gore's Legislative Director, and in 2001, joined the Albright Group, a global strategy firm headed by former secretary of state Madeleine Albright.

She's also a principal of Albright Capital Management, an investment advisory firm concentrating on emerging markets, chairs the National Audubon Society board, and is on the boards of the Alliance for Climate Protection, the League of Conservation Voters, and APX, a company providing "leading-edge Market Operations and Environmental Solutions." She's got the right credentials, makes the right moves, says the right things, supports the right people, and will enter the Obama administration well vetted and safe.

She'll be Obama's "energy czar," or "czarina," according to some, and "the greatest administrator (the) EPA ever had," according to Obama transition co-manager, John Podesta. Not according to others despite whatever good intentions and successes she may have had.

A 1990s observer said that her EPA (in 1995) gutted the Toxic Substances Control Act to

reverse the ban on importing PCBs, an extremely toxic chemical used as an industrial lubricant and as a fire retardant in electric transformers.

Prior to George Bush, another writer called the Clinton administration the most anti-environmental one in recent memory, and said Al Gore silently and directly assisted the effort. A typical example illustrates it. He and Browner cited a hundred or more studies linking dirty air to asthma and premature death. Publicly they supported establishing tough regulatory standards for air pollutants such as ozone and soot emissions.

Critics and the right wing media responded. The White House backed down, asked for a 10-year delay on new standards, a 30 - 50% reduction in proposals requested, and lower EPA fines for violators. For her part, Browner went along, stood silent and surrendered, so it reveals her industry agenda and shows how she'll react under pressure.

In March 2007, CounterPunch's Jeff St. Clair wrote about Gore as vice-president in an article titled "The Green Imposter" and exposed the "official myth (that he) and the national greens fought off the Visigoths." Straightaway, he, Clinton, and their team made "a series of retreats, reversals and betrayals that prompted David Brower, the grand old man of American environmentalism....to conclude that 'Gore and Clinton had done more harm to the environment than Reagan and (GHW) Bush combined.'" According to St. Clair, "The years from 1993 to 2000 were bleak ones for environmentalists, as Clinton and Gore retreated from one campaign pledge after another," and, of course, team members acquiesced, Browner for one.

Lisa Jackson and Nancy Sutley

Jackson will be the new EPA administrator and Sutley the chairwoman of the White House Council on Environmental Quality. The public deserves better for both positions.

Before becoming governor Jon Corzine's chief of staff on December 1, Jackson was New Jersey's top environmental official as head of the state's Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). At best, her record was mixed, but for critics it was poor to dismal.

According to the Washington-based Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER), it "should disqualify her from serving as the next head of the US Environmental Protection Agency. In many instances, Jackson embraced policies at DEP echoing the very practices at the Bush EPA which Senator Barack Obama condemned during the presidential campaign."

DEP employees called her "politicized" and accused her of suppressing scientific information, issuing gag orders and threats against professional staff members who objected, and acting against the environment, not for it. "Little of what occurred during her 31-month tenure" qualifies her to be Obama's EPA administrator. "Under her watch, New Jersey's environment only got dirtier, incredible as that may seem." Other criticisms of her stewardship included:

- DEP malfeasance endangering public health;
- rising water pollution levels;
- the contamination of drinking water supplies and poisoning of wildlife with no cogent

state response;

— the gross mismanagement of the state’s hazardous waste clean-up program; and

— one of her first administrative acts was to appoint the lobbyist for the New Jersey Builders Association as her assistant commissioner to oversee water quality and land use permits; Jackson later convened an industry-dominated task force to rewrite DEP policies and relax pollution enforcement; her entire tenure was marked by closed-door deal-making with polluters and lobbyists; she can now do nationally what she did to New Jersey.

Los Angeles deputy mayor Nancy Sutley oversees climate change and energy policy for the city as well as serving on the Southern California Metropolitan Water District board of directors. Her record earned praise, but for others it’s mixed, and according to some, she’s “safe.”

She earlier served in the Clinton administration as a senior policy advisor to the regional EPA administrator (for Region 9, San Francisco), as special assistant to Carol Browner, and later as an energy advisor to governor Gray Davis, a member of the California State Water Resources Control Board, and as deputy secretary for policy and intergovernmental relations in the state EPA.

Her other positions include being policy director for the National Independent Energy Producers (IEP) – “California’s oldest and leading nonprofit trade association, representing the interest of developers and operators of independent energy facilities and independent power marketers.”

In addition, she’s been an industry economist for the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) – in charge of interstate electricity rates, wholesale electric rates, hydroelectric licensing, natural gas pricing, and oil pipeline rates. It also reviews and authorizes liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminals, interstate natural gas pipelines and non-federal hydropower projects. Sutley may be the least controversial of Obama’s team, but that judgment must await her on-the-job performance, and no appointee in any capacity will engage in unfriendly business practices.

Ken Salazar

He’s a rancher and Colorado’s junior senator (elected 2004), the state’s former attorney general, and Obama’s choice for Interior Secretary. Environmentalists object, and so do others for his Senate record.

In May 2005, he was one of the “Gang of 14” to compromise on filibustering Bush’s judicial appointments. Under the agreement, the so-called “nuclear option” would only be exercised under “extraordinary circumstances,” meaning Bush appointees nearly always went unopposed and a rogue slate now occupies the federal bench.

Salazar also supported the appointment of Alberto Gonzales for Attorney General and introduced and sat with him at a Senate confirmation hearing. In addition, he backed Gale Norton for Interior and the worst of her pro-business policies; William Myers III, a former ranching industry lobbyist and Interior Department solicitor, for the federal bench even though the American Bar Association rated him “not qualified.”

His overall environmental record is dismal. In 2005, he voted against increasing fuel

efficiency, or so-called “Corporate Average Fuel Economy” (CAFE) standards, for cars and trucks. He also opposed an amendment to repeal tax breaks for ExxonMobil and other Big Oil companies and supports oil and gas drilling on federal lands with few restrictions.

In August 2006, he supported Joe Lieberman against the moderate anti-war candidate Ned Lamont. He also voted to end protections that limit offshore Florida Gulf Coast drilling, subsidies for the livestock industry, others for ranchers and other users of public lands and the national forests. He fought efforts to increase Farm Bill protections for endangered species and the environment and threatened to sue the US Fish and Wildlife Service when its scientists determined that the black-tailed prairie dog may be endangered.

In 2007, he was one of the few Democrats to oppose a bill to require the Army Corps of Engineers to consider global warming when planning water projects. According to Project Vote Smart (a mostly volunteer group that vets political candidates and elected officials), the US Humane Society rates Salazar 25% on his voting record. The Fund for Animals scores him 0% for 2005 - 2006 while the Defenders of Wildlife (with a long record of questionable practices and undisclosed funding sources) rates him 60%.

Overall, environmentalists are angered and justifiably so. Kieran Suckling, head of the Tucson-based Center for Biological Diversity (CBD) said: Salazar “is very closely tied to ranching and mining and very traditional, old-time, Western, extraction industries. We were promised that an Obama presidency would bring change.” Salazar will deliver none. He’s especially weak on “protecting scientific integrity, combating global warming, reforming energy development and protecting endangered species.”

Tom Vilsack

He was Iowa governor from 1999 - 2007, a former chairman of the right wing Democratic Leadership Council (DLC), and Obama’s choice for Agriculture Secretary. Not a farmer, his agricultural background consists of building relationships with the state’s large corn producers and supporting their generous subsidies. He’s also closely tied to the Ag giants, and, of course, that’s a prerequisite for his new job. With him directing policy, their agenda is safe, not the public’s.

In February 2004, he gave Monsanto two awards for “environment excellence” - one a “special recognition for energy efficiency/renewable energy” and the other a “special recognition for air quality.” Besides being the world’s largest GMO seed producer, Monsanto makes a stew of toxic chemicals and spreads them globally - including glyphosate herbicide, alachlor, and butachlor.

The company is responsible for releasing at least 265,000 pounds of chemicals annually into the Mississippi River. According to the US Fish and Wildlife Service, “the combined effect of the Monsanto discharge with other discharges may severely stress and degrade the (aquatic) habitat.” That’s besides how it poisons top soil with chemical contaminants and GMO plantings.

Nonetheless, the Organic Consumers Association said it welcomes Vilsack’s apparent backing for a “modest reduction in our nation’s annual \$17 - 25 billion subsidies to chemical, energy-intensive and genetically engineered crops such as corn, soybeans, and cotton.” However, it wants all “non-green” subsidies ended. “We can no longer afford to use US tax money to subsidize chemical and energy-intensive crops that basically prop up

factory farm profits and the junk food industry, make consumers unhealthy, waste valuable non-renewable resources, and destabilize the climate.”

Obama and Vilsack will disappoint. They support ethanol and other biofuels production, big subsidies for the Ag giants, and the proliferation of harmful GMO crops. Why else would the Biotechnology Industry Organization (BIO) once give him the Governor of the Year award “for his support of the industry’s economic growth and agricultural biotechnology research.”

In 2000, Vilsack founded and chaired the Governors Biotechnology Partnership (initially with 13 governors and now over double that). It’s a clearing house for biotech information and to promote the worldwide acceptance and use of GMO seeds.

In 2005, he initiated the Seed and Plant Preemption Bill to prevent local authorities from regulating these seeds, including deciding if and where they may be planted and the right to establish GMO-free buffer zones. These foods harm human health, but Vilsack supports their proliferation everywhere. The Agriculture Department under his stewardship will assure it.

Arne Duncan

Since June 2001, he’s been CEO of the Chicago Public Schools and will be Obama’s new Education Secretary. Children of the nation watch out. Duncan jeopardizes your educational prospects if he’ll do for the nation what’s he done to Chicago. Sadly, that’s why Obama chose him.

Last April, this writer did a major article on Destroying Public Education in America and explained how privatization schemes threaten to end a 373 year tradition. Duncan has been a lead player in Chicago. He’ll now take his agenda national. Here’s an excerpt from the article:

Duncan led Chicago’s Renaissance 2010 Turnaround strategy for 100 new “high-performing” elementary and high schools in the city by that date. Under five year contracts, they’ll “be held accountable....to create innovative learning environments” under one of three “governance structures:”

— charter schools under the 1996 Illinois Charter Schools Law; they’re called “public schools of choice, selected by students and parents....to take responsible risks and create new, innovative and more flexible ways of educating children within the public school system;” in 1997, the Illinois General Assembly approved 60 state charter schools; Chicago was authorized 30, the suburbs 15 more, and 15 others downstate. The city bent the rules, initially operated about 53 charter “campuses,” and now has nearly 100.

Charter schools aren’t magnet ones that require students in some cases to have special skills or pass admissions tests. However, they have specific organizing themes and educational philosophies and may target certain learning problems, development needs, or educational possibilities. In all states, they’re legislatively authorized; near-autonomous in their operations; free to choose their students and exclude unwanted ones; and up to now are quasi-public with no religious affiliation. Administration and corporate schemes assure they won’t stay that way because that’s the sinister plan. Duncan is a key part of it.

George Bush praised these schools last April when he declared April 29 through May 5 National Charter Schools Week. He said they provide more “choice,” are a “valuable educational alternative,” and he thanked “educational entrepreneurs for supporting” these

schools around the country.

Here's what the president praised. Lisa Delpit is executive director of the Center for Urban Education & Innovation. In her capacity, she studies charter school performance and cited evidence from a 2005 Department of Education report. Her conclusion: "charter schools....are less likely than public schools to meet state education goals." Case study examples in five states showed they underperform, and are "less likely than traditional public (ones) to employ teachers meeting state certification standards."

Other underperformance evidence came from an unexpected source - an October 1994 Money magazine report on 70 public and private schools. It concluded that "students who attend the best public schools outperform most private school students, that the best public schools offer a more challenging curriculum than most private schools, and that the private school advantage in test scores is due to their selective admission policies."

Clearly a failing grade on what's spreading across the country en route to total privatization and the triumph of the market over educating the nation's youths.

In 1991, Minnesota passed the first charter school law. California followed in 1992, and it's been off to the races since. By 1995, 19 states had them, and in 2007 there were over 4000 charter schools in 40 states and the District of Columbia with more than one million students in them and growing.

Chicago's two other "governance structures" are:

- contract (privatized) schools run by "independent nonprofit organizations;" they operate under a Performance Agreement between the "organization" and the Board of Education; and

- performance schools under Chicago Public Schools (CPS) management "with freedom and flexibility on many district initiatives and policies;" unmentioned is the Democrat mayor's close ties to the Bush administration and their mutual preference for marketplace education; the idea isn't new, but it accelerated rapidly in recent years.

Another part of the scheme is also in play, in Chicago and throughout the country. Inner city schools are being closed, remaining ones are neglected and decrepit, classroom sizes are increasing, and children and parents are being sacrificed on the alter of marketplace triumphalism.

Consider recent events under Mayor Richard Daley in Chicago. On February 27, the city's Board of Education unanimously and without discussion voted to close, relocate or otherwise target 19 public schools, fire teachers, and leave students out in the cold. Thousands of parents protested, were ignored and denied access to the Board of Ed meeting where the decision came down pro forma and quick. It wasn't the first time and won't be the last. For years under the current mayor, Chicago has closed or privatized more schools than anywhere else in the country, and the trend is accelerating. Since July 2001, the city closed 59 elementary and secondary schools and replaced many of them with charter or contract ones.

The trend continues in Chicago and across the country to "reform" education nationally, hand it to business profiteers, destroy teacher unions, end public education, commodify it, educate the well-off, cheat underprivileged kids, consign them to low-wage, no benefit

service jobs, and end the American dream for millions.

Arne Duncan will head to Washington to do it with schemes like the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) that became law on January 8, 2002. It succeeded the 1994 Goals 2000: Educate America Act that set eight outcomes-based goals for the year 2000 but failed on all counts to meet them. Goals 2000, in turn, goes back to the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and specifically its Title I provisions for funding schools and districts with a high percentage of low-income family students.

NCLB is outrageous, and Duncan administered the worst of it in Chicago. It's long on testing, school choice, and market-based "reforms" but short on real achievement. It's built around rote learning, standardized tests, requiring teachers to "teach to the test," assessing results by Average Yearly Progress (AYP) scores, and punishing failure harshly – firing teachers and principals, closing schools and transforming them from public to charter or for-profit ones.

Critics denounce the plan as "an endless regimen of test-preparation drills" for poor children. Others call it underfunded and a thinly veiled scheme to privatize education and transfer its costs and responsibilities from the federal government to individuals and impoverished school districts. Mostly, it reflects current era thinking that anything government does business does better, so let it. And Democrats (like Duncan and Obama) are as supportive as Republicans.

So far, NCLB renewal bills remain stalled in both Houses, election year politics have intervened, and final resolution will be for the new administration and 111th Congress to decide. For critics, that's positive because the law failed to deliver as promised. Its sponsors claimed it would close the achievement gap between inner city and rural schools and more affluent suburban ones. It's real aim, however, is to commodify education, end government responsibility for it, and make it another business profit center.

Obama promised to fix "the broken promises of" NCLB. Whatever's done will affect millions of students already harmed with little chance that the worst of this act will be changed. Nonetheless, National Education Association (NEA) president, Dennis Van Roekel, is hopeful that the new administration will be "the beginning of a promising new period for public education in this country."

Arne Duncan won't let it. He told Congress that NCLB funding "should be doubled within five years, and that the law must be amended to give schools the maximum amount of flexibility possible...." Repealing the law, ending the funding and privatization schemes, and fostering policies to educate all kids equally regardless of socioeconomic status is what's needed. Obama and Arne Duncan won't let it. They've consigned poor kids to the trash bin.

Below are some of Duncan's policy initiatives in Chicago:

- using the Chicago Board of Education's \$5.5 billion budget to hand out no-bid contracts to cronies for all sorts of goods and services; Duncan recommends them to the seven-member board, and nearly always they're approved unanimously with no discussion or debate;

- militarizing the city's high schools (to the greatest extent ever in the city and perhaps the country) on the pretext of offering students "choice;" he not only institutionalized JROTC programs, but he established high schools devoted entirely to military studies; the overwhelming majority of their students are poor minorities;

— he litigated to be freed from an early 1980s federal desegregation consent decree; he claims he's done all he can to comply even though Chicago school students are predominantly black and over 90% black and Latino; the city has over 300 segregated schools and an additional 40 or more all-Latino ones;

— he opposes and litigated against federal oversight of special education programs; he violates the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), ignores parents' wishes, the needs of the children, and teachers are forced to go along; and

— under Duncan, Chicago has nearly 100 quasi-private charter schools, many of them run by for-profit companies; less than 10% of them are integrated; the city is notorious for violating the education needs of minority students; its schools for them are sub-standard and abysmal;

Duncan's agenda for the nation will be to:

— destroy public education nationally;

— privatize the nation's schools;

— militarize them;

— destroy teacher unions;

— educate the well-off, not the poor;

— standardize testing under NCLB; and

— wreck the American dream for millions of disadvantaged kids who'll be sacrificed on the altar of marketplace education.

Mary Schapiro

She's Obama's pick to head the SEC, an agency in disarray under George Bush and earlier. Its mandate is to enforce and regulate federal securities laws, the industry, the nation's stock and options exchanges, and other electronic securities markets. Its web site states that its "mission....is to protect investors, maintain fair, orderly, and efficient markets, and facilitate capital formation." Given the "maturity" of today's securities exchanges, there's "even greater need for sound market regulation."

The problem is that under George Bush and earlier, SEC provided scant little of it and most often none at all where it matters most. The result is incidents like the Madoff scandal costing investors worldwide billions. His investment firm wasn't even registered with the SEC until September 2006. Yet the agency was alerted that he was running a scam and still did nothing to investigate. Earlier there was Enron, Worldcom, many others, and still more to come. Plus the greatest ever financial/economic crisis, the result of collateralized debt obligations (CDOs), mortgage-backed securities (MBSs), subprime loans, and other structured finance fraud (making Madoff look minor by comparison) for lack of oversight and good policy, that may wreck world economies before it's over.

Too often SEC is a facilitator, not a regulator, and when the latter it's careful not to interfere with the powerful. Whether Schapiro will change things is problematic and doubtful. She

spent years advocating for Wall Street to be self-regulating. There's little doubt where her interests lie and which ones she'll represent in her new post.

She's currently CEO of the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority (FINRA) and served as president of NASD Regulation (National Association of Securities Dealers). In 2006, she became NASD's chairman and CEO. FINRA calls itself "the largest non-governmental regulator for all securities firms doing business with the US public" at a time virtually none of it exists, and where was FINRA as the current global crisis unfolded.

Earlier in 1994, Schapiro was chairperson of the Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC) that supposedly regulates commodity futures and option markets, but, in fact, too often is derelict. When Wendy Gramm (wife of former Senator Phil Gramm) headed the agency (from 1988 to 1993), she and her husband pushed through the "Enron Loophole" for the company's "Enron On-Line." It freed it from oversight, let it fleece customers and investors, and ultimately its employees from bankruptcy. Before it did, Wendy joined Enron's board and reportedly earned from \$915,000 to \$1.8 million for her services, including her earlier ones.

From 1988 - 1993, Schapiro served six years as an SEC commissioner. In January 2008, George Bush appointed her to the newly established President's Advisory Council on Financial Literacy. It focuses on economic empowerment issues and is run by the Treasury Department. Schapiro is also a member of the International Organization of Securities Commissions (IOSCO) and was chairperson of the IOSCO SRO Consultative Committee from 2002 - 2006. IOSCO is another body supposedly "to promote high standards of regulation in order to maintain just, efficient and sound markets." It, too, was quiet in the run-up to the global crisis and surely did nothing to prevent it.

Ray LaHood

He's a Republican congressman (since 1995) and insider. He's also closely linked with Obama's Chief of Staff-designee Rahm Emanuel, and the president-elect's choice for Transportation Secretary. According to some, his resume is thin. He doesn't serve on the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, and as a member of the Appropriations Committee, he's not involved in transportation funding. In his new role, he'll play a big part in Obama's economic stimulus efforts, especially its planned infrastructure components.

Hope for Peace and Justice rates LaHood 0%. The non-partisan LCV Scorecard (on energy and environmental issues) gives him a lifetime 27% rating and even lower scores for individual years. The Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) rates him 25% and NARAL Pro-Choice America rates him 0%. LaHood is another establishment pick, called a moderate but, in fact, is hard right, and, according to critics, a poor choice for an important job.

Gary Gensler and Daniel Tarullo

On December, Obama chose Tarullo for a vacant Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) seat. Lest readers forget, the Federal Reserve is a private for-profit banking cartel (representing Wall Street, not the public) in charge of the nation's money, its supply and price. As economist Michael Hudson explains, bankers don't earn their money. They "extract" it from the economy, meaning, of course, from us.

One example is with the Fed Funds rate an effective 0%, banks can borrow at that rate, lend

at whatever they wish and make big profits. For credit cards, it's up to 20% or more plus hidden and special fees. For 30-year fixed-rate mortgages, it's on average 5.19% as of December 18.

Michael Hudson explains what's happening in new book (in progress) titled "The Fictitious Economy: How Finance is Destroying Industrial Capitalism and Paving the New Road to Serfdom." It involves a lot more than credit cards and home mortgages. It includes a whole range of financial engineering schemes, massive fraud, the bubble economy, war and militarism, much more as well, and the damage in combination they're doing to America.

Gensler will contribute to the problem as head of the Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC). He's a former Treasury Undersecretary (1999 - 2001), before that Assistant Secretary of the Treasury from 1997 - 1999, and another Goldman Sachs alumnus, so watch out. And refer to the above on how the CFTC, like the SEC, is ill-managed. Odds are that Gensler, a Wall Street insider, will continue that tradition. It's up to him to prove otherwise.

The same goes for all Obama selections, including New York housing commissioner Shaun Donovan for Housing Secretary, Bronx Borough president Adolfo Carrion for director of the new Office of Urban Policy, and former Senator, majority leader, and consummate insider Tom Daschle for Health and Human Services. On his watch, the prospect for universal health care is zero. His reform advocacy (like Clinton's in the 1990s) is to let marketplace medicine handle it. Clearly that route won't work, and Daschle's mandate is to assure it.

Two additional appointments will be announced on December 19 - California Representative Hilda Solis for Labor Secretary and former Dallas mayor, lobbyist, and Lloyd Bentsen aide Ron Kirk for US trade representative. Kirk is strongly pro-"free trade," meaning, of course, the one-way kind benefitting US business at the expense of exploited developing nations. He'll pursue that agenda in his new post.

Solis is more interesting at a time that working Americans continue to lose rights, be ill-represented by union bosses, and keep seeing their standard of living lowered and future prospects dimmed. Believing Solis can help reverse that trend is wishful thinking at the least. Nonetheless, she'll bear watching in her new post as we enter an economic dark age and labor needs more help than at any time since the 1930s. Almost for certain, little to none will be forthcoming.

Only a few key appointments remain unnamed (including for CIA, director of national intelligence, two more FOMC vacancies, and a third one expected), and they'll fall right in line with the others. Those wanting change will be sorely tested, badly disappointed, and soon enough will know they were "Fooled Again." What else would we expect from the "Greatest Con-Man in Recent History."

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