

## Acting for Justice

Track our national debt: [www.publicdebt.treas.gov/opd/opdint.htm](http://www.publicdebt.treas.gov/opd/opdint.htm) It is kept current every month on the U.S. treasury website. Let your Congressional delegation know that you are watching it and watching their votes. The debt is a time-bomb waiting to explode as the years go on without paying it down.

The Center for Economic and Policy Research conducts professional research and public education. Geared to filling important gaps in the understanding of particular economic and social problems, or the impact of specific policies. <http://www.cepr.net/>

Become familiar with the Government Accountability Office. Under the directorship of David Walker, Comptroller General, this office has actively investigated and reported to Congress on the fiscal condition of our nation. It is perhaps the best site for accurate, credible financial information. [www.gao.gov](http://www.gao.gov)

See also [www.federalbudget.com](http://www.federalbudget.com)

Read the text of Keith Olbermann's response to the signing of the Military Commission Act. <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/15321167/>

For more information about the Toxics Release Inventory and the Environmental Protection Agency, visit <http://www.epa.gov/tri/>

CREA: Center for Reflection, Education and Action, Inc.

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### Whose Recovery?

*"In the first half of 2006, the share of national income going to wages and salaries was the lowest on record, while the share going to corporate profits was the highest since 1950..."*

*"This recovery is the first one on record in which corporate profits have captured a larger share of the total growth in national income during the recovery than have wages and salaries."*

Center on Budget and Policy Priorities,  
Policy Points, Sept. 1, 2006.  
*Whose Recovery? Labor Day 2006 Finds Many Americans Not Sharing in the Growing Economy*, page 1.  
[www.cbpp.org](http://www.cbpp.org)

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CREA is an independent 501(c)3 organization.



CREA

*"Believing that the earth is home to all, CREA facilitates analysis of human, social and economic policies from the perspective of their effects on human lives, beginning with the lives of those who are poor."*

CREA Mission Statement

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CREA

# STARTING POINTS

Center for Reflection, Education and Action, Inc.

Hartford, CT 06146-2507

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## 2006 MID-TERM ELECTIONS AND THE ON-GOING ISSUES

The mid-term elections are over, and we enter a season of change and hope. Weary of the media focus on personalities and the offensive attack ads of the campaign, we may well long for real, honest dialogue about the serious issues that face our democracy and our planet. These issues go beyond partisanship, party loyalty, and personalities. They are issues that will be with us for decades to come, and the future of both our democracy and our planet are at stake. Our needs are many and belong to all of us.

*a just and honorable solution to the war Iraq;*

the willingness to come to grips with the national debt that eats up our resources;

*a moderation of the relentless pursuit of profit maximization that has caused tragic global consequences for workers and for the environment.*

serious and effective ways to address our national dependence upon oil, coal and gas for energy needs;

*a return to real education, and respect for learning and hard work;*

honest reporting of what is happening in our community, state and nation;

*a commitment to protect our fragile democracy, and our national commitment to justice and human rights.*

The challenges are collective and require collaboration. No single one of us can deal with all of them. What we *can* do is choose one as our focus, connect with other individuals and organizations that address the issue, and resolve to do what is within our power to bring about positive change. Our children and our children's children depend upon us.



## CREA LAUNCHES FAIR TRADE-PEACE TRADE INITIATIVE

Some years ago in Haiti, Dumond, driver for the Women to Women project, challenged Sister Ruth. "So many projects focus on women," he said. "You need to start a program that will help the men. If they have no decent work, their only alternatives are the military, drugs, or gangs."

Dumond's challenge came to mind when Sister Ruth encountered the *Ruth and Nohemi* cooperative in Guatemala. Started as a way for the war's widows to support themselves, the cooperative has begun to include young men. Decent work for men provides alternatives to the gangs and the militia.

Fair Trade/Peace Trade incorporates the concepts of both fair trade and decent work for peace. We encourage our readers to share in this effort by purchasing the crafts that the *Ruth and Nohemi* cooperative produces, particularly at this season of gift-giving. The flyer is enclosed in this mailing.

## CREA EUROPE

At its June 30, 2006 meeting the CREA Board of Directors gave its approval to the establishment of CREA Europe as a non-governmental organization in Brussels, Belgium.

This expansion of CREA will place it in a position to collaborate more effectively with other non-governmental groups in the European Union, and to participate more closely in the economic and governmental projects that the EU undertakes.

As always, our goal is the sustainability of human communities and of our planet, particularly as the lives of the most vulnerable communities are affected.

Patrick Neytes, of Brussels, has agreed to be the senior advisor to CREA Europe, and the following persons are the founding Board for CREA Europe:

Vic Thorpe – coordinator, Just-Solutions-Network ;

Alan Christie – director at the UK Commission of Racial Equality ;

Margaret Wachenfeld – director of Children's Rights Policy at UNICEF;

Patricia Zerega, CREA Board member.

Ruth Rosenbaum, TC, PhD, president of CREA, Inc.

## EXPANDING POWER OF THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH—EXTRA-ORDINARY AND DANGEROUS TO DEMOCRACY

Ever since the Bush administration took office in 2000, it has sought to accumulate power, reaching across long-respected boundaries meant to divide it from Congress and the courts. The most important steps taken to amass that power, though, have come out of sight of the flag-waving and speechmaking, after the cameras have gone.

In almost six years, President Bush has vetoed just one bill that crossed his desk. However, he has quietly challenged more than 800 laws through “signing statements,” in which he often argues that the law infringes on his powers as commander in chief. He has said that he can sidestep a ban on torture and disobey oversight rules in the law reauthorizing the Patriot Act. In September, the nonpartisan Congressional Research Service said his signing statements are an important part of a “comprehensive strategy to strengthen and expand executive power.” Samuel Alito Jr. championed such signing statements as a Justice Department lawyer; he now sits on the Supreme Court.

Of course, President Bush has asserted that his government can eavesdrop on phone calls without first obtaining the required court warrants. Then, on October 17, 2006, the president signed into law the Military Commissions Act, which allows him to:

- define torture, without publicly explaining his definitions;
- permit coerced and secret evidence to be used against defendants;
- and declare a non-U.S. citizen or a legal resident an “enemy combatant,”
- and detain that person indefinitely – perhaps forever – without permitting any court challenge to the detention.

Immediately after the signing, the Justice Department told the federal courts that they no longer could hear lawsuits filed on behalf of Guantanamo detainees.

It has been difficult to understand how these extraordinary changes to the shape of our government have attracted so little notice, so little outrage. People go to work and to the store, as always; meanwhile, the legislature gives the president the right to wipe away the writ of habeas corpus – one of the oldest recognized rights in Western legal history. What words can convey how drastically this move changes the character of our nation?

## THE MILITARY COMMISSIONS ACT OF 2006—A CLOSER LOOK ... BY RAE MARIE STACK

The Military Commissions Act of 2006 came in response to the Supreme Court’s ruling in *Hamdan v. Rumsfeld* that President Bush lacked the authority to try Guantanamo detainees, and that the CIA had violated detainee treatment standards.

The new legislation sought to grant Bush such authority and clearly establish how to proceed with the detainees. It does so quite clearly. Under this new act, Bush has the authority to create military tribunals and try detainees who qualify as “enemy combatants.”

They may not invoke the Geneva Conventions as a source of their rights and the legitimacy of the courts cannot be challenged. During trials, defendants cannot see evidence being used against them if it is classified, but will be granted a “substitute.”

Further, hearsay evidence and evidence obtained through coercion can be admitted if considered “reliable” or important to the case. Most notably, though, the Act eliminates the right to a writ of *habeas corpus* for all detainees, meaning none of them can appeal to

a court claiming that their detention was illegal.

While those detainees brought to trial can appeal the outcome to a small civilian court, detainees not brought to trial are allowed no appeals whatsoever. By eliminating the right to appeal, this Act throws away the last safeguard these detainees would have in the American judicial system.

While it initially received criticisms from both Democrats and Republicans, the act passed with little fanfare in both the House and the Senate. On October 17<sup>th</sup>, 2006, President Bush signed into law the Military Commissions Act of 2006.

**Military Commissions Act of 2006 (Enrolled as Agreed to or Passed by Both House and Senate) S. 3930.** See <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/C?c109:./temp/~c109ygh99Z> To see how your Senators and Representatives voted, please go to the websites below. <http://clerk.house.gov/evs/2006/roll508.xml> <http://www3.capwiz.com/c-span/issues/votes/?votenum=259&chamber=S&congress=1092>

## RIGHT TO KNOW ... BY DEB NAYBOR

The US Environmental Protection Agency claims that “every American has the right to know the chemicals to which they may be exposed in their daily living.”

The EPA provides information on dangerous toxins released into the air, water or land through the Toxics Release Inventory (TRI). For almost 20 years, being able to access current listings has allowed management and monitoring by municipalities, emergency response teams, environmentalists and private citizens, as well as providing data to the media.

Sounds like the EPA cares about the welfare of its citizens, doesn't it? Well, only to an extent....

Proposed changes to TRI would jeopardize the effectiveness of reporting at all. Companies would

report every other year instead of annually. Certain toxins such as lead and mercury, which accumulate in the body, would not require disclosure of leaks or spills. And the EPA would allow companies to release ten times more toxic substances before detailed reports would be required.

While some government officials reply that few citizens use the TRI and that the financial savings to both corporations and the EPA are worth the reduction in information, over 120,000 respondents to a request for public comments on the change oppose the reduction of reporting.

This failure to protect public health and guard the environment has brought criticism from Attorneys General and 200 government agencies.

The EPA has currently been suspended from finalizing the proposals by the House of Representatives but there is constant pressure from industry not to report on toxins release.

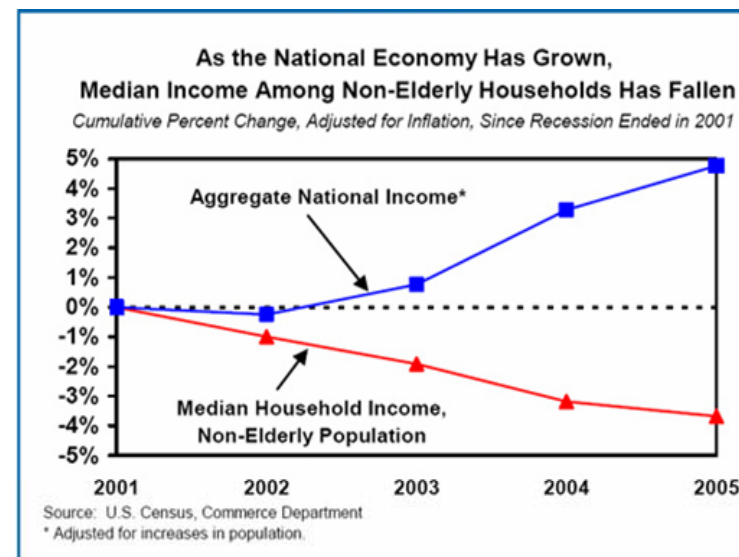
For more information, go to the Working Group on Community Right to Know website at [www.crtk.org](http://www.crtk.org) or check out OMB Watch at [www.ombwatch.org](http://www.ombwatch.org) for updates

Guest Writers for this issue are:

Deb Naybor, founder of *Both Your Hands*, a non-profit organization connecting caring communities with impoverished villages and working through microloans.

Rae Marie Stack, graduate of Fairfield University and graduate student at the University of Connecticut. Rae Marie says she has always been the one in her classes to ask the hard questions.

## US INCOME GAP GROWS STEADILY



The graph above is a dramatic presentation of the contrast between the optimistic reports on the growth of national income and the decline in median non-elderly population income. It is this reality that explains why most of us are not experiencing a rise in income at the same time that national figures are telling us how well the economy is doing.

According to the Center for Economic and Policy Research, the bottom fifth of households in the income distribution have seen their income drop since 2000 by 5.6%, the second lowest fifth by 3.8%, the third fifth by 2.5%, the fourth fifth by 1.1%. Only the top fifth of households saw an increase since 2000, 0.8%.\*

\*Center for Economic and Policy Research. *Poverty Byte*. By Heather Boushey, senior economist. August 26, 2006 [www.cepr.net/bytes/poverty\\_byte\\_2006\\_08.html](http://www.cepr.net/bytes/poverty_byte_2006_08.html)

## More on the Federal Debt

*Analytic Perspectives: Budget of the U.S. Government, from the Office of Budget and Management*, has an excellent explanation of the federal debt. It is a good source for deepening our knowledge of where the debt comes from, who holds it, and how it is managed.

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/fy2007/pdf/spec.pdf>

The budgeted 2006 federal debt is \$8.577 trillion. The budgeted interest is \$218 billion.\* Federal estimates see the debt rising to \$11.5 trillion by 2011, with interest reaching \$310 billion. This is an unsustainable course, and managing the debt is a huge challenge not only for the new Congress, but for the entire country.

\* ( *Analytic Perspectives*, pages 235 and 371)