



TAKE IT or LEAVE IT...

By Jim Stiles

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ALMOST FUBAR...

I feel some need to explain the technical problems that accompanied the October/November issue's web posting. Ultimately, we got the Zephyr online and for those of you who were happy to see the end of the PDF downloads, I could not agree more. But if future efforts to make such changes prove to be as difficult and labor intensive and exasperating as this one was, I'd never try it again. And I would go broke as well.

For years Moabite Gary Henderson was my webmaster and his responsibilities were limited when we were a paper publication. When I was forced to give up the newsprint, Gary adapted the PDF format, with my blessings, based in part on the fact that this publication operates on a shoestring. Posting the pages as PDFs was a relatively simple procedure and it rarely took Gary more than four hours to get the pages online.

But from the beginning, I received regular complaints about the PDFs...for some they worked well and downloaded quickly, for others it was like watching grass grow. Still more could not get them to open at all. Sometimes the PDFs downloaded to readers' desktop. Clearly I had to make a change.

Several webmasters volunteered proposed options, none of which Gary felt he had time to pursue, since he only does web work part-time, and so I finally hired someone else who assured me he could show and implement "alternatives to putting the paper together in a way that will open quickly and still look like the Zephyr. I know it can be done pretty easily and once it's in place it'll just be a matter of plugging in your stuff out of InDesign. Main thing is to KEEP IT SIMPLE."

I was hesitant and made it clear that I could not afford any changes that were labor intensive and costly. But finally, I went forward.

I don't doubt his sincerity or his conviction that the switch could be "easy" and "simple." But it turned out to be a nightmare for him and for me.

His Grand Plan simply did not work. Ultimately he was trying to cut and paste the entire issue into html style sheets, a paragraph at a time from the PDFs. The agonizingly slow transfer created hundreds of new typos and dead links and misplaced and scrambled paragraphs in the process.

Finally, five days past our planned posting day, I recruited the services of my web host, who was able to access the site and fix most but not all of the problems. NONE of the work that had been put into that issue, except perhaps the home page, could be used again. As one web designer noted, it had too "much internal spaghetti and bad development practices" to even consider using it for this issue.

We finally put October/November online late on October 3. As I type this, weeks before this issue is posted, I am still not sure how we are going to accomplish that task.

In the long term, I may heed the advice of the web host and completely abandon the "newspaper look" of The Zephyr. He suggests I post the entire site within WordPress. I would, in fact, welcome your thoughts. Are you agreeable to a Zephyr web site that looks like everyone else's? It may come to that.

I do have one ace up my sleeve and if this edition offers an html version that makes the PDFs an option and allows you to flip from one page to the next, you will know that my Ace worked. If it doesn't, then we must retreat in the short-term to the PDF format until next June. I hope you will bear with me. I am doing my best.

OBAMA and "PROGRESSIVES" ...ONE YEAR LATER

It has been more than a year since Barack Obama's stunning presidential victory. I was 10,000 miles away on election night but even from my remote location, the jubilation was palpable. It was an incredible evening.

That night I received an email from longtime Grand County resident and political/environmental activist Dave Ehrley. Though I was just one of many recipients, since The Zephyr seemed to play a role in his message, I probably interpreted his words a bit more personally. I was inclined to respond immediately, perhaps even in the next issue of The Zephyr. But I decided to give it some time.

Now, a year later, I think the time has come. First here is Dave's email:

Dear all,

Obama carried Grand County, Utah. The progressive, green, candidate won all three contested County Council seats and the progressives now have a clear majority on the Council. How loud can I sing "Happy Days are here again"? This all reflects the demographic changes that have occurred in Grand County in the last four years... Fallout from the amenities economy I guess...

So this Fall, we have lost Jim Stiles and the Canyon Country Zephyr to Australia but we, progressives, have gained political standing locally. Jim, this is another aspect of the amenities economy you have been hammering on. I hope you have the courage to discuss the pros and not just the cons of the demographic shift you outline so well in Brave New West. I must say, I will miss the Zephyr but I WELCOME this new political environment here behind the Zion Curtain in Grand County. Oh, Happy Day!!!

Dave Ehrley

In the last year I have pondered the meaning of "progressive" or "green" or "liberal" and its true meaning, and frankly it has become a bit hazy to me. Certainly there are essential differences between the two major parties, sometimes inflexible positions that I once called "ideological entrenchment," but now I'm not so sure ideology has anything to do with it. It has more to do with "partisan intractability."



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Is there a difference anymore in the minds of most knee-jerk liberals and conservatives between rhetoric and real action? Just because some politician gives a speech, does that really *change* anything, or does it simply make the speaker's constituency feel better? Have we come to the point where "feeling better" is all that matters?

With passion and conviction and eloquence, Obama promised real change for our country during his historic campaign. And I am eager to acknowledge that "partisan intractability" comes from both ends of the political spectrum---the right wing propagandists never fail to disappoint me when it comes to shameless and hysterical distortion. Still, I'm not sure at times what they're frothing over. On many levels, policy has not changed all that much.

More than anything, President Obama benefits from the fact that he succeeds one of the worst and certainly the most inarticulate president in the history of this republic. He cannot help but fare well by comparison. But is that good enough to placate and even seduce his supporters?



I look off over the shore of my western sea,
having arrived at last where I am...
the circle almost circled.
But where is what I started for so long ago,
and why is it yet unfound?

Walt Whitman

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President Obama promised we'd be disengaged completely from Iraq by 2010, But recently sectarian violence and death have increased, in direct proportion to our reduced military presence; if our departure from Iraq allows civil war to erupt again, what will he do?

In Afghanistan, our involvement has *increased* and soon he must decide whether to heed the recommendation of his military and send as many as 40,000 more troops into harm's way. Meanwhile, our military strikes continue to kill Afghan civilians by the hundreds and we still refer to them as "collateral damage." Where is Code-Pink, the organization of women who practically camped out in front of the White House for six years during the Bush years? Why is "collateral damage" under the Obama administration any less disturbing than his predecessor's? (Code-Pink recently placed a very defensive statement on its web site, insisting they still oppose the war and then disingenuously suggest to their critics that THEY go out and picket the new president)

He promised to shut down GITMO, where at last count, 226 men remain imprisoned, some for years, and all without ever being charged with a crime. One of the bulwarks of our justice system is the right to a fair and speedy trial. Why still, does this fundamental right not apply to them? In fact, the main thrust of the GITMO debate recently has only been a question of where the detainees should be relocated. I am quite sure that for the prisoners, *where* they remain locked up is of little difference or consequence. They should be charged with a crime or freed NOW.

Obama promised to take a stronger position in support of gay rights and his rhetoric, as recently as October, still made that commitment. Yet, his own justice department is currently opposing in federal court, a law suit by two gay men who are demanding survival benefits for gay couples.

Obama promised to bring an end to reckless and greedy speculation by the banking industry, but gave them billions of dollars once he was in office, creating an almost unfathomable federal debt. His connections to banking giants like Goldman Sachs are no less tightly bound than those of his predecessor.

His attempts at health care reform are so muddled, I'm not even sure what his latest proposal is.

According to a government report, the Obama "stimulus package" has so far created just 30,000 jobs and unemployment has risen to almost 10%. While Wall Street shows dramatic signs of a turnaround, the average American continues to suffer.

He recently dodged meeting the Dalai Lama; liberal columnist Maureen Dowd wrote that, "Obama had indeed tried

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to curry favor with China by declining to see the Dalai Lama until after the president's visit to China next month."

And finally, our retreat from any serious policy to deal with the effects of climate change and its tragic consequences remain an embarrassment. Other than what appears to be the biggest sell-off of public lands since the transcontinental railroad to "green companies" who hope to reap millions from the development of "alternative energy" and devastate the American Landscape in the process, there is nothing coming from the current leadership but more rhetoric. And "cap & trade?" It is a joke. Now the public is having doubts about the validity of climate change itself. The administration's lack of leadership and candor must be held accountable.

And yet, supporters of this administration sit silently and say nothing. Why is this?

Camille Paglia, one of the last true independent journalists in this country, a writer willing to express an honest opinion and let the chips fall recently wrote:

But affluent middle-class Democrats now seem to be complacently servile toward authority and automatically believe everything party leaders tell them. Why? Is it because the new professional class is a glossy product of ge-

nerically institutionalized learning? Independent thought and logical analysis of argument are no longer taught... Why has the Democratic Party become so arrogantly detached from ordinary Americans? Though they claim to speak for the poor and dispossessed, Democrats have increasingly become the party of an upper-middle-class professional elite, top-heavy with journalists, academics and lawyers (one reason for the hypocritical absence of tort reform in the healthcare bills). Weirdly, given their worship of highly individualistic, secularized self-actualization, such professionals are as a whole amazingly credulous these days about big-government solutions to every social problem. They see no danger in expanding government authority and intrusive, wasteful bureaucracy. This is, I submit, a stunning turn away from the anti-authority and anti-establishment principles of authentic 1960s leftism.

Some defenders of the current crown will argue that we have simply not given Obama enough time. But in the cruel hard light of 21st century American politics, there is NOT a lot of time for a president to affect real change. It is imperative that he act swiftly and decisively. With mid-term elections less than 11 months away, the administration will find itself being even more cautious, fearful of losing its congressional majorities. But what has it accomplished with its veto-proof majority so far?

I remember what the great journalist, Edward R. Murrow once said: "We should never confuse dissent with disloyalty. When the Loyal Opposition dies, so does America." It's possible to be the "Loyal Opposition" within your own

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party as well. Abraham Lincoln sought the advice and even assigned cabinet positions to his most vocal opponents. I'd like to believe that we can still offer criticism without being disloyal, more than a century later.

When it comes to "progressive" matters at the local level, I must plead ignorance. I really don't know what the politics of Moab are like these days, having fled the premises five years ago. I was reminded of that last year when I criticized a compromise proposal by future County Councilman Chris Baird to allow a smaller 75,000 square foot Wal-Mart into Moab, if the giant retailer decided to make such a move. I thought the idea was absurd and still do. A "gentler and kinder" mini-Wal-Mart would still have a devastating effect on many small Moab businesses. Baird was not pleased. He fired off a volatile reply but he did make one fair point when he wrote, that I was "not engaged in the community you write about."

He is right. But I did recruit the comments of a friend of mine, a resident of Moab for 30 years and a person long involved in the political process. I have also always admired her candor and honesty, even when I suffered for it. And because of her position in the community, she asked if she could maintain her anonymity. Since her statements slander no one and because I think her points are well-made, I sought and received her advice. As I have done in the past, I asked her to play devil's advocate with me and as an advocate for "progressive" government in Grand County. I asked her how the "progressive" movement is faring in Grand County and if she were a member of the governing bodies, what would her claim to "progressive" government successes be. Her response was as witty and direct as always, but I could not help but wonder if she and Ms. Paglia are related. She replied:

One of the difficulties is figuring out exactly what the "progressive agenda" is...you can now raise chickens in Moab, but last night at the city council meeting the animal control officer reported a big jump in skunks in Moab...Let's see, actual policy, there is nothing, but they

did, as a county council, challenge the rest of rural Utah on the question of oil and gas development (everyone else is for it, Grand County is a'gin it), they rallied support for DeChristopher, they spoke out against the Green River nuclear plant, they made it known to the public that Grand County leaders are against tar sands and oil shale research, and they are considering bike trails in Spanish Valley.

...but really, "progressive" has always meant supporting the oppressed against the oppressor, labor against the bosses, indigenous people against colonizers, with a progressive media that "comforts the afflicted, and afflicts the comfortable." And from that point of view, the Moab "progressives" are not progressive...they support restrictive zoning, which keeps out Hispanic and Native American families from living in downtown Moab....Their approach to oil and gas is not to make oil and gas development safer, less polluting and less impacting, but more a NIMBY approach, where we don't have to look at it (no thought to the drilling going in Nigeria and Mexico and Brazil and other places with nowhere near the environmental oversight the industry has here)....and they are in fact anti-sustainable, calling for decreased densities for housing, encouraging a sprawl mentality that increases infrastructure, energy costs, and greenhouse gases....

Once again, it is style more than substance that separates progressives from their counter-parts. Rhetoric rules.

Finally, though I still heed Mr. Baird's comments about my lack of engagement in Grand County affairs, I will take the liberty of placing my unwanted nose into one corner of Moab's changing community. If there is one aspect of the "amenities economy" to which Dave Ehrley defends in his November 5, 2008 letter, he must acknowledge it was and is that very same economy that has made it virtually impossible for anyone of modest financial means to ever hope of buying a home in Moab without incurring unspeakable debt.

Twenty-five years ago, it was easy for someone like myself, a lowly seasonal ranger living on \$8000 a year, to buy a home. Consequently it allowed for a remarkably diverse and interesting population of varied interests to reside side-by-side. I will also be the first to admit that when I finally sold my home in Moab two years ago, I made a ridiculous profit from my original investment.

Yet, I would give it all back in a heartbeat if I could change history and discover that my same old bungalow on Locust Lane is worth no more today than it was 25 years ago. For if that were the case, I would still be living in that same house, in the same town that I thought would be my

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home forever. Because Moab would still be the quiet little town I discovered, so many years ago..

So the idea, now put forth by Mr. Ehrley that the "amenities economy" somehow created a political atmosphere that would allow the election of a progressive government and an opportunity to create solutions for issues like affordable housing, when it was the amenities economy that created the crisis in the first place...well the wrongheaded nature of that kind of thinking is too obvious to pursue. I leave it to the reader to form his or her own opinion.

As always, this publication has for 21 years and for as long as it lasts, been an open forum. No letter has ever been rejected, no matter how critical it might be of me or The Zephyr's content. If Dave Ehrley or other Grand County progressives, or President Obama himself (!) would like to add their comments or take issue with mine, the door is always open.