

## TRENDEVENTS OCTOBER 2006

**Deeper and Deeper** - The New York Times | Editorial 05 October 2006

For the first time during President Bush's tenure, the government's interest bill is expected to rise in 2006, from \$184 billion in 2005 to \$220 billion this year, up nearly 20 percent. That increase - \$36 billion - makes interest the fastest-growing component of federal spending, and continued brisk growth is likely. According to projections by Congress's budget office, the interest bill will grow to \$249 billion in 2007, and \$270 billion in 2008.

All of that is money the government won't have available to spend on other needs and priorities. And much of it won't even be recycled back into the United States economy. That's because borrowing from foreign countries has exploded during the Bush years. In 2005, the government paid about \$77 billion in interest to foreign creditors in China, Japan and elsewhere.

And that's not the worst of it. While foreign investors were putting up most of the **\$1.5 trillion** the federal government has borrowed since 2001, they were also snapping up hundreds of billions of dollars in private sector securities, transactions that have been a big source of the easy money that allowed Americans to borrow heavily against their homes.

The result, as The Wall Street Journal reported last week, is that for the first time in at least 90 years, the United States is now paying noticeably more to foreign creditors than it receives from its investments abroad. That is a momentous shift. It means that a growing share of America's future collective income will flow abroad, leading to a lower standard of living in the United States than would otherwise have been achieved. Americans deserve better than this financial mess.

<><><><><><><><>

***Add this report to the long list of terrible news for the economy:***

*America is living beyond its means* \* *Middle class in worst shape ever* \* *100 thousand Jpbs cut in Sept.*

*Analysts concerned about recession* \* *Debt warning as rising number face threat to their homes*

*Housing slowdown may hit bank profits*

### **Americans becoming increasingly house poor**

#### **Census data shows percentage of income spent on dwelling up in 49 states**

The Associated Press - October 3, 2006 <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/15107993/>

WASHINGTON - Americans are becoming increasingly house poor. Homeowners in every state but one spent more of their incomes on housing costs last year than at the start of the decade, according to data released Tuesday by the Census Bureau. Those in Alaska spent the same.

Nationwide, homeowners spent nearly 21 percent of their incomes on housing costs last year, up from just under 19 percent in 1999. Housing analysts blamed surging home prices, higher interest rates and lower incomes for hurting affordability.

"It is now much more difficult for first-time homebuyers to get into the market, and for existing homeowners to trade up," said Mark Zandi, chief economist at Moody's Economy.com. "This decline in affordability is the catalyst for the current sharp decline in housing activity."

The housing market has gone soft in many areas, but home prices are still much higher than they were at the start of the decade. Nationwide, median home values jumped 32 percent from 2000 to 2005, to \$167,500. Household incomes have not kept up, dropping 2.8 percent during the same period. "Until incomes catch up, the housing market is going to remain flat," Zandi said. America's home ownership rate



But the real issue isn't the number of jobs. It's their quality, and that's the big problem. Detroit's Big Three paid wages, health and pension benefits that together amounted to about \$80 an hour in today's money. The Japanese transplants in America pay half as much. Wal-Mart pays less than a quarter as much. Meanwhile, hospital orderlies and elder-care workers don't come near matching the United Auto Workers at the old Big Three. And military work is just plain dangerous.

So as the Big Three shrink, we ought to be making up for the good jobs we're losing. One place to start would be for the nation to invest in emerging industries like bio-technology, non-fossil based energy, new materials and nanotechnologies. Out these could come the good middle-class jobs of the 21st century technician-type jobs involving upgrading, installing, repairing, injecting, testing, or improving upon a host of products designed to prevent the spread of dread diseases, give us energy without further warming the globe, and improve the speed and durability of countless items.

Even now, there's a large and growing demand for pharmacy technicians, lab technicians, hospital technicians, and office technicians. In this post auto-worker age, young people need some education beyond high school to get these and other technical skills of the future. The sad fact is they aren't getting them. According to a recent report of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, **the post-boomer generation is less educated than the boomers, and less able to afford college. Their families can't afford the cost. And government isn't filling the gap. Pell Grants for college are less available than they were a decade or two ago. Colleges are less affordable. Federal money for job training is drying up...** There's no bringing back the Big Three. But shame on us for turning our backs on the big picture... This commentary originally appeared on Marketplace, public radio's only daily business news program, and is reprinted via a special arrangement between TomPaine.com and Robert Reich.



## **8 billion hours per year stuck in traffic**

10 Reasons Why Cars Suck by Mickey Z; September 26, 2006

There's an interesting courtroom battle shaping up out in California. The state is attempting to institute new emissions standards for greenhouse gases. California already has the toughest standards in the nation - standards adopted by 10 states, including New York. This new proposal would surpass federal emissions standards and is likely to eventually raise the national bar even higher.

DaimlerChrysler Corp., General Motors, the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers have filed suit, claiming that California is in violation of the federal Clean Air Act because the state did not get a waiver from the Environmental Protection Agency. In other words, the automobile giants are siding with the EPA and the Clean Air Act to crush regulations designed to address issues of global warming and human health. You can add this situation to the top ten list of why cars suck. Here are the other nine reasons:

2. Bumper-to-bumper: From 1950 to 1970, the U.S. automobile population grew four times faster than the human population. Today, there are around 200 million cars in America. As a result, we Americans spend 8 billion hours per year stuck in traffic.

3. Cars kill people: During the twentieth century, 250 million Americans were maimed or injured in automobile accidents. Every single day in the U.S., an average of 121 people are killed in car accidents. The leading cause of death for children aged 5 to 14 in New York City is pedestrian automobile accidents.

4. Cars kill animals: Automobiles, SUVs, trucks, and other fossil fuel-burning vehicles kill a million wild animals per week in the U.S. - not counting tens of thousands of family pets.

5. Sprawling for dollars: During the last century, an area equal to all the arable land in Ohio, Indiana, and Pennsylvania was paved in the U.S. This area requires maintenance costing over \$200 million a day. (The surreptitious cost of the car culture totals nearly \$464 billion a year in the U.S. alone, much of that going to the sustenance of a military presence in the Persian Gulf.)

6. Getting warmer? Automobiles emit one-quarter of U.S. greenhouse gases.





The signs of this are everywhere. The attacks are coming at an accelerating pace, and include frequent interventions by powerful forces, in and out of the Bush administration, who seem all too willing to deny scientific truths, disrupt scientific investigations, block scientific progress, undermine scientific education, and sacrifice the very integrity of the scientific process itself - all in the pursuit of implementing their particular political agenda. And today this dominant political agenda is profoundly allied and intertwined with an extremist (and extremely anti-science) ideological agenda put forward by powerful fundamentalist religious forces commonly known as the Religious Right. These fundamentalists now have extensive influence and representatives in major institutions of the US government, including Congress and the White House. This itself goes a long way toward explaining why science itself is under such unprecedented attack.

It is commonplace under the current Administration for the government to deny funding, censor scientific reports, or in other ways undermine scientific research which might turn up facts which they don't want to hear; to manipulate, distort, or outright suppress scientific findings they find objectionable; to attempt to reshape government scientific panels to obtain policy recommendations on issues ranging from health to the environment, based less on actual scientific findings than on the requirements of the Administration's agenda.

The situation is so serious that more than 6,000 scientists have already signed the "Restoring Scientific Integrity" statement of the Union of Concerned Scientists, which denounces the Bush Administration for "abuse of science"; and Scientific American published an editorial under the title: "Bush-League Lysenkoism: The White House Seeks to Bend Science to Its Will."

**CONSIDER THIS:**

- Particular Christian fundamentalist "moral codes" are increasingly imposing restrictions on what kinds of questions can be investigated by scientists and what kinds of answers scientists can come up with. HIV-prevention studies have come under attack for even attempting to study prevalent sexual practices. Funds have been cut and researchers have faced intimidation and harassment from fundamentalists inside and outside of government who insist that scientific study of HIV/AIDS begin and end with the demand for "abstinence-only" programs - regardless of the human and social cost. Research into human sexuality in general has been suppressed and faulty studies and outright disinformation about the effectiveness of condoms and other birth control methods have been promoted and disseminated by the Administration. The Department of Health and Human Services is known to have deleted from its web site scientific health information which conflicted with the Administration's "abstinence-only" approach to sex education ... THIS IS NOT ACCEPTABLE.
- Entire new fields of scientific inquiry, like stem-cell research, with potential for path-breaking medical breakthroughs, are denied federal funds because of fundamentalist religious objections ... THIS IS NOT ACCEPTABLE.
- Scientists whose findings conflict with corporate interests or policies of the Bush Administration face threats of retaliation or denial of funding. There have been "gag orders" forbidding government scientists from talking publicly about important scientific questions and, at times, even mentioning terms like "global warming." In studies by government scientists on global warming and its potentially devastating consequences for the planet and humanity, titles of reports have been changed and whole sections deleted by high political officials. There are repeated efforts by government officials to over-rule scientists on such things as which plant and animal species to include on the "Endangered Species" list, which natural habitats are in critical need of preservation, how to set air and water quality standards, and so on ... THIS IS NOT ACCEPTABLE.
- In a practice many have denounced as "Scientific McCarthyism," scientists who are candidates for scientific advisory boards and panels have been asked how they voted or whether they support particular policies of the Administration, and some have been denied appointments because of their political views. THIS IS NOT ACCEPTABLE.
- Official government-run bookstores at the Grand Canyon have carried books promoting as fact the literalist Biblical notion that the Grand Canyon was formed only a few thousand years ago by "Noah's Flood," in direct contradiction to the overwhelming geological evidence and scientific consensus that the Grand Canyon contains rocks that are billions of years old and that the Canyon itself was carved out by a river, over a very long period of time, millions of years ago ... THIS IS NOT ACCEPTABLE.

And that is not all: Here we are in the 21st century, and the head of the government himself, George W. Bush, refuses to acknowledge that evolution is a scientific fact! THIS IS NOT ACCEPTABLE.

The President claims: "On the issue of evolution, the verdict is still out on how God created the earth," and then sits smugly by while Creationists carry out an assault against evolution in classrooms, museums, libraries, government bookstores, and even IMAX movies and science theaters.

No, Mr. President, the verdict is NOT out on evolution. EVOLUTION IS A FACT - IT IS ONE OF THE MOST WELL-ESTABLISHED AND WELL-DOCUMENTED FACTS IN THE HISTORY OF SCIENCE. TO DENY AND ATTACK EVOLUTION IS TO DENY AND ATTACK ONE OF THE MOST FUNDAMENTAL FACTS ABOUT ALL OF NATURE AND REALITY AND ONE OF THE MOST CRUCIAL FOUNDATION STONES OF ALL OF MODERN SCIENCE. Evolution is not a matter of "controversy" in the scientific community: It is recognized as a fact by the overwhelming majority of scientists in the US and throughout the world. Evolution is just as well-established as the fact that the earth goes around the sun - a scientifically-demonstrated truth which, several centuries ago and for some time, was also opposed and even viciously suppressed because of a religious inquisition, resulting in great harm to science and to humanity. We cannot, and will not, allow the same kind of thing to happen with the scientific fact of evolution... Therefore, we, the undersigned scientists and members of the scientific community, are issuing this urgent call to everyone in society to take up the challenge to DEFEND SCIENCE.

To be clear: Many who continue to hold religious beliefs can and should rally to this call to DEFEND SCIENCE. This is not about science trying to destroy religion. It is about defending science from a specific right-wing political agenda which, coupled with a fundamentalist, Biblical-literalist religious ideology, is setting out to implement a program that will fundamentally pervert and undermine science and the scientific process itself.

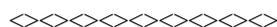
Individual scientists may be atheists or agnostics, or may hold various religious beliefs; and their politics range over the full spectrum of political views. But one thing the overwhelming majority of scientists have in common is their understanding that, when conducting scientific investigation and applying the scientific method, it is essential to use as a starting point previously accumulated scientific knowledge - the storehouse of well-established scientific evidence about reality which has previously been arrived at through concrete and systematic scientific observation and experiment and has been subjected to rigorous scientific review and testing. This is what we scientists stand on as our foundation when we set out to further investigate reality and make new discoveries. This is how science has been done and how it has advanced for hundreds of years now, and this has allowed science to benefit humanity in countless ways.

Genuine science never proceeds from, or uses as its starting point, any set of subjective "beliefs," "opinions" or "faith-based edicts" handed down by religious or secular authorities and proclaimed to be beyond human questioning, testing and investigation. To bring into the scientific process assumptions, religious or otherwise, which were not arrived at by scientific methods, and which by definition cannot be tested by scientific methods, would destroy science as science.

In conclusion: We must refuse to accept a situation where scientific inquiry is blocked or its findings ruled out of order unless they conform to the goals of the government, to corporate interests and to the ideology of religious fundamentalists; where dogma enforced by governmental and religious authority takes the place of science; where the scientific approach of seeking natural explanations for natural phenomena is suppressed. We must insist on an atmosphere where scientists are allowed to seek the truth, even when the truth conflicts with the views and policies of those in power, and where the scientific spirit is fostered, where science education and the popularization of the scientific method are valued, where people are encouraged to pursue an understanding of how and why things are the way they are; where all that has been learned by humanity so far, all that has repeatedly been tested and found to be true, serves as the starting point for further investigation of reality.

IT IS UP TO US. IT IS TIME TO TAKE A CLEAR AND DECISIVE STAND IN DEFENSE OF SCIENCE. THIS IS OF CRUCIAL AND URGENT IMPORTANCE NOT ONLY FOR SCIENTISTS BUT FOR PEOPLE THROUGHOUT SOCIETY, FOR HUMANITY AS A WHOLE AND FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS.

(End Statement) [www.defendscience.org](http://www.defendscience.org)

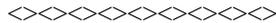


## **The world went into the ecological red on Monday – Oct. 9, 2006 - Jeremy Lovell, Reuters**

Ecological Debt Day or Overshoot Day, measures the point at which the consumption of resources exceeds the ability of the planet to replace them -- and it gets earlier every year. "The fact that this year, ecological debt day falls on Oct. 9, only three quarters of the way through the year, means that we are living well beyond our environmental means," said the New Economics Foundation (NEF) think-tank... "This leads ... to a net depletion of the resources. From Oct. 9 until the end of the year, humanity will be in ecological overshoot, building up ever greater ecological debt," it added.

Calculating the rate of resource consumption against the planet's ability to replenish it, the group said humanity first went into ecological debt on Dec. 19, 1987. Eight years later the date had moved forward nearly a month to Nov. 21, and in 2006 it has jumped to Oct. 9 -- showing an accelerating rate of change. "By living far beyond our environmental means and running up ecological debts we make two mistakes," said NEF policy director Andrew Simms... "Firstly, we deny millions globally who already lack access to sufficient land, food and clean water the chance to meet their needs. Secondly we put the planet's life support mechanisms in peril," he said... For instance, if more fish are caught each year than spawn, then less fish will be available the following year, NEF said.

Britain went into ecological overshoot on April 16, barely three months into the year -- suggesting that if everyone in the world consumed at the same rate as Britons then the world would need the resources of three planets to support just this one. "The only way to balance the budget and end overshoot is to demand less of our planet," NEF said.



## **Against An Imperial Internet *October 17, 2006* by TomPaine.com by Bill Moyers and Scott Fogdall**

It was said that all roads led to Rome. However exaggerated, the image is imprinted in our imagination, reminding us of the relentless ingenuity of the ancient Romans and their will to control an empire. For centuries Roman highways linked far-flung provinces with a centralized web of power. The might of the imperial legions was for naught without the means to transport them. The flow of trade the bloodstream of the empires wealth also depended on the integrity of the roadways. And because Roman citizens could pass everywhere, more or less unfettered on their travels, ideas and cultural elements circulated with the same fluidity as commerce.

Like the Romans, we Americans have used our technology to build a sprawling infrastructure of ports, railroads and interstates which serves the strength of our economy and the mobility of our society. Yet as significant as these have been, they pale beside the potential of the Internet. Almost overnight, it has made sending and receiving information easier than ever. It has opened a vast new marketplace of ideas, and it is transforming commerce and culture. It may also revitalize democracy.

Wait a minute! you say. You cant compare the Internet to the Roman empire. There's no electronic Caesar, no center, controlling how the World Wide Web is used.

Right you are so far. The Internet is revolutionary because it is the most democratic of media. All you need to join the revolution is a computer and a connection. We don't just watch; we participate, collaborate and create. Unlike television, radio and cable, whose hirelings create content aimed at us for their own reasons, with the Internet every citizen is potentially a producer. The conversation of democracy belongs to us.

That wide-open access is the founding principle of the Internet, but it may be slipping through our fingers. How ironic if it should pass irretrievably into history here, at the very dawn of the Internet Age.

The Internet has become the foremost testing ground where the forces of innovation, corporate power, the public interest and government regulation converge. Already, the notion of a level playing field, what's called network neutrality is under siege by powerful forces trying to tilt the field to their advantage. The Bush majority on the FCC has bowed to the interests of the big cable and telephone companies to strip away, or undo, the Internets basic DNA of openness and non-discrimination. When some members of Congress set out to restore network neutrality, they were thwarted by the industry's high spending

lobbyists. This happened according to the standard practices of a rented Congress with little public awareness and scarce attention from the press.

There had been a similar blackout 10 years ago, when, in the Telecommunications Act of 1996, Congress carved up our media landscape. They drove a dagger in the heart of radio, triggered a wave of consolidation that let the big media companies get bigger, and gave away to rich corporations for free public airwaves worth billions.

This time, they couldn't keep secret what they were doing. Word got around that without public participation these changes could lead to unsettling phenomena on the rise of digital empires that limit, or even destroy, the capabilities of small Internet users. Organizations across the political spectrum from the Christian Coalition to MoveOn.org rallied in protest, flooding Congress with more than a million letters and petitions to restore network neutrality. Enough politicians have responded to keep the outcome in play.

At the core this is a struggle about the role and dimensions of human freedom and free speech. But it is also a contemporary clash of a centuries-old debate over free-market economics and governmental regulation, one that finds Adam Smith invoked both by advocates for government action to protect the average online wayfarer and by opponents of any regulation at all.

In *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith argued that only the unfettered dealings of merchants and customers could ensure economic prosperity. But he also warned against the formation of monopolies mighty behemoths that face little or no competition. Our history brims with his legacy. Consider the explosion of industry and the reign of the robber barons during the first Gilded Age in the last decades of the 19th century. Settlements and cities began to fill the continent, spirited by a crucial technological advance: the railroad. As railroad companies sprang up, they merged into monopolies. Merchants and farmers were often charged outlandish freight prices until the 1870s, when the Granger Laws and other forms of public regulation provided some protection to customers.

At about the same time, chemist Samuel Andrews inventor of a new method for refining oil into kerosene partnered with John D. Rockefeller to create the Standard Oil Company. By century's end Standard Oil had forged a monopoly, controlling a network of pipelines and railways that spanned the country. Competition became practically impossible as the mammoth company manipulated prices and crushed rival after hapless rival. Only with the passage of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act in 1890 did the public have hope of recourse against the overwhelming might of concentrated economic and political power. But, less than a century later a relative handful of large companies would assemble monopolies over broadcasting, newspapers, cable and even the operating system of computers, and their rule would go essentially unchallenged by the U.S. government.

Now we have an Internet infrastructure that is rapidly evolving, in more ways than one. As often occurred on Rome's ancient highways, cyber-sojourners could soon find themselves paying up in order to travel freely. Our new digital monopolists want to use their new power to reverse the way the Internet now works for us: allowing those with the largest bankrolls to route their content on fast lanes, while placing others in a congested thoroughfare. If they succeed in taking a medium that has an essential democratic nature and monetizing every aspect of it, America will divide further between the rich and poor and between those who have access to knowledge and those who do not.

The companies point out that there have been few Internet neutrality violations. Don't mess with something that's been working for everyone, they say; don't add safeguards when none have so far been needed. But the emerging generation, which will inherit the results of this Washington battle, gets it. Writing in *The Yale Daily News*, Dariush Nothaft, a college junior, after hearing with respect the industry's case, argues that: Nevertheless, the Internet's power as a social force counters these arguments. A non-neutral Internet would discourage competition, thereby costing consumers money and diminishing the benefits of lower subscription prices for Internet access. More importantly, people today pay for Internet access with the understanding that they are accessing a wide, level field of sites where only their preferences will guide them. Non-neutrality changes the very essence of the Internet, thereby making the product provided to users less valuable.

The monopolists tell us not to worry: They will take care of us, and see to it that the public interest is honored and democracy served by this most remarkable of technologies. They said the same thing about radio, television, and about cable... *Scott Fogdall is with Films Media Group. Visit [www.pbs.org/moyers](http://www.pbs.org/moyers).*