

PROJECT CENSORED's TOP 25 NEWS STORIES

The Project Censored team has undergone the exhaustive process of selecting and evaluating the most important American and global news stories of 2010–2011 that received little or no attention by the mainstream media.

Compiled by
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Each year, the Project Censored team, based at Sonoma State University, California, selects and evaluates thousands of news stories published in the national and international mainstream media as well as in the alternative press. The team ultimately decides on the top 25 most underreported but important stories. Following is an edited summary of Project Censored's 2010–11 selection. To see the full report with sources and references, visit <http://tinyurl.com/3ou5huq>. The book Censored 2012, edited by Mickey Huff and Project Censored, is now available. — Editor

1. More US Soldiers Committed Suicide than Died in Combat

In 2010, for the second year in a row, more US soldiers killed themselves (468) than died in combat (462). "If you think you know the one thing that causes people to commit suicide, please let us know," General Peter Chiarelli told the *Army Times*, "because we don't know what it is." Suicide is a tragic but predictable human reaction to being asked to kill—and watch your friends be killed—for a war based on lies. Perhaps being forced to bag the mangled flesh of fellow soldiers could be another reason why some are committing suicide.

Body-bagging: ever heard the term? Soldiers in the Marine Corps' Mortuary Affairs unit at Camp Al-Taqaddum, Iraq, are given this job of collecting and cataloguing the bodies of dead Marines. They sift through the soldiers' remains and put them in body bags which they then place in metal boxes and, in turn, into refrigerated units. They sort through personal effects, from lists and prom photos to suicide notes and love letters, parcel them up and send them back to the Marines' families.

One soldier, Jess Goodell, recounts the case of a Marine brought in to the unit still breathing. She frantically called to her superiors, to which they simply replied, "Wait". She watched while he died. When she returned to the US, Goodell like many others, was diagnosed with deep depression, substance abuse, post-traumatic stress disorder and anxiety.

2. US Military Manipulates the Social Media

The US military is developing software that will let it secretly manipulate social media sites by using fake online personas to influence Internet conversations and spread pro-American propaganda.

A Californian corporation has been awarded a contract with US Central Command (CENTCOM), which oversees US armed operations in the Middle East and Central Asia, to develop an "online persona management service" that will allow one US serviceman or servicewoman to control up to 10 separate identities based all over the world. The CENTCOM contract stipulates that each fake online persona must have a convincing background, history and supporting details, and that up to 50 US-based controllers could operate false identities from their workstations.

The multiple-persona contract is thought to have been awarded as part of a

program called Operation Earnest Voice (OEV), which was first developed in Iraq as a psychological warfare weapon against the online presence of al-Qaida supporters and others resisting the US military and political presence in Iraq. This effort proved successful and is now being used elsewhere in the Middle East and beyond, with assurances that none of these interventions would happen at home as it would be unlawful to "address US audiences" with such technology.

3. Obama Authorises Assassination Campaign

The Obama administration has quietly put into practice an "incomplete idea" left over from the Bush II presidency: creating a *de facto* "presidential international assassination program". Court documents, evidence offered by Human Rights Watch and a special United Nations report allege that US citizens suspected of encouraging "terror" had been put on "death lists".

Reports of the "death lists" say Obama's Director of National Intelligence told a congressional hearing that the program was within the rights of the Executive Branch of the government and did not need to be revealed.

At least two people are known to have been murdered by Central Intelligence Agency operatives under the program.

When the program was challenged in a New York City court, the judge refused to rule, saying that "there are circumstances in which the executive's unilateral decision to kill a US citizen overseas is 'constitutionally committed to the political branches' and judicially unreviewable".

4. Global Food Crisis Expands

A new worldwide spike in agricultural commodity and food prices is generating both predictable and extraordinary fallouts. The search for causes once again leads to a conjuncture of flawed policies in trade, environment, finance and agriculture that is likely to produce more dangerous volatility in years to come.

Over the past year, food prices around the world shot sharply upwards, surpassing the previous price surge in 2007–2008 to set a new record, as measured by the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization.

In February 2011, the UN's food price index rose for the eighth consecutive month to the highest level since at least 1990. As a result, since 2010 began, roughly another 44 million people have quietly crossed the threshold into malnutrition, joining 925 million already suffering from lack of food.

If prices continue to rise, this food crisis will push the ranks of the hungry towards a billion people, with

another two billion suffering from the "hidden malnutrition" of inadequate diets, nearly all in the developing countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America. That deprivation will shorten lives and stunt young minds, hitting the most vulnerable populations such as the urban poor of food-importing countries in cities like Cairo, Tunis and Dhaka.

5. Private Prisons Fund Anti-Immigrant Legislation

Over the past four years, roughly a million immigrants have been incarcerated in dangerous detention facilities in the US taxpayer-financed private prison system. Children were abused, women were raped and men died from lack of basic medical attention.

Arizona's Governor Jan Brewer received substantial campaign financing from Corrections Corporation of America (CCA) and GEO Group, which are the nation's two largest companies that finance, design, build and

operate prisons. CCA, based in Nashville, Tennessee, and GEO Group, a global corporation based in Boca Raton, Florida, are the principal moving forces in the behind-the-scenes organisation of the current wave of anti-immigrant legislative efforts. Both CCA and GEO, which rely almost exclusively on revenue from tax dollars at local, state and federal levels, profited from the incarceration of immigrants apprehended by US

Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

CCA's top management in Tennessee contributed the largest block of out-of-state campaign contributions received by Governor Brewer. Brewer employs two former CCA lobbyists as aides; they assisted in signing Arizona SB 1070 into law on 23 April 2010. CCA, which already has several detention facilities in Arizona and is hoping to expand its immigrant business in that state, is expected to show a huge increase in revenues following the implementation of SB 1070.

6. Google Spying via Street View?

In 2010, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) investigated Internet search engine giant Google for illegally collecting personal data such as passwords, emails and information from other online activities from unsecured Wi-Fi networks in homes and businesses across the United States and around the world. Google has claimed that the data were accidentally picked up by their Street View cars while driving the world's streets. Clearly, this is an invasion of the public's privacy and yet the FTC has done basically nothing about it—not even a slap on the wrist for Google.

In late October 2010, David Vladeck, Director of the FTC's Bureau of Consumer Protection, sent a two-page

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letter to Google attorney Albert Gidari, saying that the FTC has ended its inquiry into the matter, with little more than an assurance from Google that it will make "improvements to its internal processes" and "continue its dialogue with the FTC". Why was nothing done about it?

Less than a week before the FTC's decision to drop the inquiry, President Obama attended a \$30,000-a-person Democratic Party fundraiser at the Palo Alto, California, home of Google executive Marissa Mayer. Also, Google's former head of public policy, Andrew McLaughlin, joined the Obama administration as the deputy chief technology officer in mid-2009. Other Obama administration officials include Eric Schmidt, Google's executive chairman, who serves as a member of the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology. Katie Stanton joined the administration as the Director of Citizen Participation after serving as a Google project manager. The former head of Google's global development, Sonal Shah, is now the head of the White House's Office of Social Innovation. These facts suggest that the Obama administration may have a conflict of interest in its handling of the company's civil rights violations.

7. US Army and Psychology

In the January 2011 issue of *American Psychologist*, the American Psychological Association devoted 13 articles to detailing and celebrating a US\$117 million collaboration with the US Army, called Comprehensive Soldier Fitness (CSF). It's being marketed as resilience training to reduce if not prevent adverse psychological consequences to soldiers who endure combat. Because of the CSF emphasis on "positive psychology", advocates call it "an holistic approach to warrior training".

Criticism arose shortly after the initiative was announced. It included ethical questions about whether soldiers should be trained to be desensitised to traumatic events, and methodological concerns about large-scale programs similar to this which have not worked or have had adverse effects in the past. Also problematic is that this program is adapted primarily from the Penn Resiliency Program, which had very little success with a non-military population. Now, on its first trial run, it is going to train 1.1 million soldiers. How about trying it out on small groups of soldiers first?

The CSF program measures soldiers' "resilience" in

five core areas: emotional, physical, family, social and spiritual. The spiritual component of the assessment contains questions written predominantly for soldiers who believe in God or another deity. This means that tens of thousands of non-believers will score poorly and be forced to use religious imagery exercises that are counter to their personal beliefs—and not likely to foster resilience.

8. The Fairytale of Clean and Safe Nuclear Power

Nuclear power presents a security threat of unprecedented proportions. It's capable of a catastrophic accident that can kill hundreds of thousands of people with a byproduct that is toxic for millennia. To call nuclear power "clean" is an affront to science, common sense and the English language itself, yet industry backers, inside and outside government, are attempting to establish a new Clean Energy Standard to promote nuclear power. These proposals suffer from three fundamental misconceptions, that:

1) pollutants other than carbon dioxide are irrelevant when defining a "clean energy";

2) because radiation is invisible and odourless, it is not a toxic pollutant;

3) nuclear power is carbon-free. None of these is true.

In its most recent report, released in 2005, the US National Academy of Sciences determined that *no* safe level of radiation exposure exists; every exposure to radiation increases the risk of cancer, birth defects and other disease. The US Nuclear Regulatory Commission accepts the linear no-threshold (LNT) hypothesis, which states that any

increase in the dose of radiation, no matter how small, results in an incremental increase in risk, as a conservative model for estimating radiation risk.

9. Government-Sponsored Weather Modification

Rising global temperatures, increasing population and degradation of water supplies have created broad support for the growing field of weather modification.

The US government has conducted weather modification experiments for over half a century, and the military-industrial complex stands poised to capitalise on these discoveries.

One of the latest programs is HAARP, the High-frequency Active Auroral Research Program. This technology can potentially trigger floods, droughts,

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hurricanes and earthquakes. The scientific idea behind HAARP is to "excite" a specific area of the ionosphere and observe the physical processes in that excited area with the intention of modifying ecological conditions. HAARP can also be used as a weapon system, capable of selectively destabilising agricultural and ecological systems of entire regions.

Another EnMod (environmental modification) program is that of atmospheric geo-engineering or cloud seeding, which has found new life since the global warming scare. Cloud seeding involves creating cirrus clouds from aircraft contrails. Unlike regular contrails which dissolve in minutes, these artificial contrails can last for several hours or even days. Once the artificial clouds have been created, they are used to reflect solar or man-made radiation.

At an international symposium held in May 2010, scientists asserted that "manipulation of climate through modification of cirrus clouds is neither a hoax nor a conspiracy theory". The only conspiracy surrounding geoengineering is that most governments and industry refuse to admit publicly what anyone can see in the sky or discover in peer-reviewed research. The Belfort Group has been working to raise public awareness about toxic aerial spraying—popularly known as "chemtrails". However, scientists prefer the term "persistent contrails" to describe the phenomenon, to move the inquiry away from amateur conspiracy theories.

Aerospace engineer Dr Coen Vermeeren, of Delft University of Technology, presented the Belfort Group-commissioned 300-page scientific report entitled "Case Orange – Contrail Science: Its Impact on Climate and Weather Manipulation Programs Conducted by the United States and its Allies". He stated clearly: "Weather manipulation through contrail formation...is in place and fully operational." Vermeeren mentioned a 1991 patent now held by Raytheon, a private defence contractor, with "18 claims to reduce global warming through stratospheric seeding with aluminum oxide...thorium oxide...and refractory Welsbach material". Authors of the study expressed concern that Raytheon makes daily flights spraying these materials in our skies, with minimal government oversight. Raytheon is the same company that holds the HAARP contract with the US government.

Other countries are also experimenting. The Chinese government announced in April 2007 the creation of the

first-ever artificial snowfall over the city of Nagqu in Tibet. China now conducts more cloud-seeding projects than any other nation.

10. Real Unemployment: One Out of Five in USA

The corporate media want America to feel secure during a time of unemployment crisis, but people deserve to know what is really happening. The latest unemployment rate released by the US Bureau of Labor Statistics dropped in January from 9.4 per cent to 9.0 per cent, giving the illusion that the US economy is recovering. This false unemployment decrease is partly explained by a "seasonal adjustment", where many people find temporary jobs during the holidays and therefore are factored into the employment rate but don't have job security. Also, after people have been unemployed for a year, the government no longer includes them in the statistics, even though they're still unemployed.

According to Shadowstats.com, the real unemployment rate is 22.2 per cent, which is more than double that claimed by the corporate media. It seems that the government is keeping people in the dark about the real unemployment rate to make people believe that the economy is improving, so that the government is praised for its success in lowering unemployment.

11. Trafficking of Iraqi Women

Human trafficking occurs throughout the world, yet has become increasingly more prevalent due to the instability produced by the Iraq War. Many Iraqi women and girls are widowed or orphaned by wartime casualties. Currently, more than

50,000 Iraqi women have fled to Jordan and Syria and are trapped in sexual servitude with no possibility of escape. Unable to support themselves or their households due to new government restrictions, thousands of Iraqi women have been preyed upon by sex traffickers who are taking advantage of this chaotic environment.

In June 2010, the US State Department released its annual *Trafficking in Persons Report*, which laid out a picture of human trafficking across the globe and reaffirmed the US commitment to ending this scourge. These trafficked women have received scant attention from American policymakers, who have the power to alleviate these women's suffering and condemn the countries that allow it to flourish.

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The US holds the solution: it can make trafficked Iraqi women a priority resettlement group and put greater pressure on the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to follow suit. Doing this would finally provide Iraqi victims of trafficking with a resettlement option that is fast and effective enough to actually help them.

12. Pacific Garbage Dump of Discarded Plastic

There is a swirling mass of plastic in the middle of the Pacific Ocean that qualifies as the planet's largest garbage dump. Much of the world's trash has accumulated in part of the Pacific Ocean (roughly 135°W to 155°W and 35°N to 42°N), based on the movement of ocean currents. The 5 Gyres Project estimates that there are 315 billion pounds of plastic in the ocean right now.

Not all plastic in the recycling bin gets recycled, and people carelessly toss plastics away. Plastic litter often ends up in waterways, and currents carry it out into the ocean. These pieces of plastic have a dire effect on marine life. Turtles confuse plastic bags for jellyfish, and birds confuse bottle caps for food. They ingest them but can't digest them, so their stomachs fill with plastic and they starve to death.

At the moment there is no easy way to clean up this major trash accumulation. However, we can stop it from getting worse by following the Ocean Conservancy's list of 10 things you can do, including living by the concept of less is more: don't buy stuff you don't need, and choose items that use less packaging. Other actions are at <http://www.oceanconservancy.org>.

13. State of Emergency to Supersede Constitution?

A program dating back to the Eisenhower era, of emergency measures for an America devastated in a nuclear attack, has now been converted to bestow secret powers on the President for anything he considers to be an emergency.

The National Emergency Centers Establishment Act (HR 645), introduced into Congress in January 2009, calls for the establishment of "national emergency centers" in major regions in the USA. The stated purpose of these centres is to provide "temporary housing, medical, and humanitarian assistance to individuals and families dislocated due to an emergency, major disaster" or to "meet other appropriate needs" determined by the Secretary of Homeland Security.

Recent "Continuity of Government" planning has quietly removed time-honoured constitutional protections and increased the militarisation of civilian law enforcement.

For the first time in US history, military troops (vs local law enforcement) are allowed to do police actions in US cities. Historically this has been illegal according to longstanding Posse Comitatus statutes.

There is good reason for the constructive friction between existing law enforcement agencies so that power is distributed in a democracy, and local law enforcement is responsible to local citizens. It should concern us all that there has been a loss of local authority and that there are sustained preparations for the possibility of martial law.

14. Genital Mutilation Continues in Kenya

Girls as young as nine years old were threatened with death if they tried to escape Kamunera, in the Mount Elgon district of Kenya, where they awaited female genital mutilation. In December 2010, over 100 girls in this region were targeted for circumcision but were rescued by Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organisation officials.

Parents and grandparents in this area tell the girls that they will never get married and that no man will want them if they don't have the procedure. Not many girls are left to pursue education beyond the standard age of eight years old.

They are told that education is not meant for girls because they are supposed to get married and take care of their

husbands. Uncircumcised women generally are looked down upon and discriminated against for not having the genital mutilation procedure. Because of this, girls agree to go through with the surgery so they can be included in the rites of passage and be accepted by their community.

15. Big Polluters Freed from Environmental Oversight

The Obama administration has distributed billions of dollars in stimulus money to some of the nation's biggest polluters and has granted exemptions from basic environmental errors. The administration's main goal, in Secretary of Energy Dr Steven Chu's words, is to "get the money out and spent as quickly as possible". It is trying to boost the economy and create more jobs for the unemployed.

The administration has awarded more than 179,000 "categorical exclusions" to stimulus projects funded by federal agencies, freeing those projects from review under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Coal-burning utilities like Westar Energy and Duke Energy, chemical manufacturer DuPont and ethanol maker Didion Milling are among the firms with histories of serious environmental violations that have won blanket NEPA exemptions.

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Even a project at a Texas City, Texas, refinery owned by BP (which has the oil industry's worst safety record), and the site of a deadly 2005 explosion as well as a benzene leak in early 2010, secured a waiver for the preliminary phase of a carbon capture and sequestration experiment involving two companies with past compliance problems. The so-called "stimulus" funding came from the \$787 billion legislation officially known as the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, passed in February 2009.

Documents obtained by the Center for Public Integrity show that the administration has devised a speedy review process that relies on voluntary disclosures by companies to determine whether stimulus projects pose environmental harm. Corporate polluters often omitted mention of health, safety and environmental violations in their applications. Administration officials told the Center that they chose to ignore companies' environmental compliance records in making grant decisions and issuing NEPA exemptions, saying that they considered such information irrelevant.

16. Apple Workers Suffer

Apple's suppliers in China, such as Foxconn, Dafu and Lian Jian Technology, routinely violate China's law on the Prevention and Control of Occupational Diseases. Several manufacturers have replaced alcohol with n-hexane, which is used to clean parts. It is a chemical that works better than alcohol, but poisons workers. In these factories, the workers, often women in their teens or 20s, were forced to work with the poison in unventilated rooms.

Due to the chemical used at Lian Jian Technology's plant, 49 employees fell ill and were admitted to Suzhou No. 5 People's Hospital. More employees were likely poisoned, but many were pushed out before they fell ill and Lian Jian forced them to sign papers saying that they would not hold the company accountable. They left with 80,000–90,000 yuan (\$12,000–\$14,000), which they received in exchange for their lives and health and is meant to cover fees and medical costs that they would have to pay for the rest of their lives.

Apple stands alone, even among other IT companies which routinely cause problems of heavy metal pollution, in its evasiveness and refusal to work with green groups.

17. Resistant Superbugs are Spreading Worldwide

Lethal superbugs are emerging that do not respond to any known drugs. The World Health Organization states that the New Delhi superbug, also known as NDM-1, was

recently found in UK patients who had medical treatment in India and has now reached a critical point. These superbugs are resistant to carbapenem antibiotics, which is a major concern to experts because these are used for hard-to-treat infections that evade other drugs.

Already, over 25,000 people in Europe die each year from superbug infections, with many bacteria now resistant to all drugs. That figure will increase unless new, more powerful antibiotics are developed.

These bacteria, which have genetic resistance to antibiotics, have contaminated Delhi's drinking water supply. This gene spread into bacteria that cause dysentery and cholera, which can be easily passed from person to person via sewage-contaminated water.

Scientists are calling for urgent action by health authorities worldwide to tackle the new strains and prevent their global spread.

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The overuse and misuse of antibiotics is at unprecedented levels, and a lack of development of new drugs means that we could see current treatments become useless. The problem is made worse by drug companies that put off developing new antibiotics because they are seen as not profitable enough.

18. Monsanto Targets Haiti

In May 2010, several months after the 12 January earthquake that destroyed much of Haiti, the US multinational Monsanto donated 60 tons of corn and vegetable hybrid seed to the country. The US International Development Agency (USAID) took charge of the distribution.

On 4 June 2010, around 10,000 Haitian farmers demonstrated against Monsanto's donation. "If Monsanto's seed enters Haiti, farmers' seed will disappear," said Doudou Pierre Festil, member of the Peasant Movement of Papaye and coordinator of the National Haitian Network for Food Sovereignty and Food Security.

Haitian farmers denounce Monsanto because it requires them to buy new seed for every sowing season. Moreover, the organisation Farmers' Route has warned that the entry of Monsanto's seeds could force the farmers to depend on the company, which also produces the fertilisers and herbicides designed to be used with the seeds.

"The Haitian government is using the earthquake to sell the country to multinationals," declared Chavannes Jean-Baptiste, coordinator of the Peasant Movement of Papaye.

Monsanto is the world's biggest seed company, controlling 20 per cent of the seed market and 90 per cent of agricultural biotechnology patents.

19. How Aid is Used for Political Purposes

According to its February 2010 report, Oxfam has found that billions of dollars in international aid, which could have transformed the lives of many people in some of the world's poorest countries, was spent on unsustainable, expensive and dangerous aid projects which international donor governments used to support their own short-term foreign policy and security objectives. This type of aid often bypasses the poorest people and dangerously distorts the line between civilian and military activity.

The Oxfam report also showed that even though aid flows were raised while they met wealthy donors' international aid commitments between 2001 and 2008, more than 40 per cent of this aid increase was spent in just two countries, Afghanistan and Iraq, with the remainder shared among 150 other poor countries.

The report stated that, in 2010, 225 aid workers were killed, injured or kidnapped in violent attacks, compared to 85 in 2002. The politicisation and militarisation of aid in some places has made it much harder for aid agencies to provide help to those in need.

This is especially the case in Somalia, where the US humanitarian assistance for the country's desperate populations, previously the single largest source of aid, dropped eightfold in 2008–2010 due to the US government's listing some armed groups in control of most of central southern Somalia as "terrorist" under US law and ending funding if aid groups could not guarantee that no aid would reach the proscribed groups.

20. US to Outlaw GM Labelling

There is increasing concern over the health impact of growing and eating genetically modified organisms (GMOs). The World Health Organization has identified allergenicity, antibiotic resistance, gene transfer, outcrossing, GM genes introduced into wild populations, gene stability, susceptibility of non-target organisms (insects) and loss of biodiversity as potential issues in using GM seeds.

Currently, most health studies are done by GM companies which have a natural conflict of interest that can lead to biased research or reporting. Many countries, such as Japan, Australia, China and the European Union, recognise the possible risks and

require mandatory labelling for products made with GMOs. There is a growing call for more comprehensive, independent research.

However, the official position of the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Department of Agriculture (USDA) is that there is no difference between GMOs and non-GMOs. These agencies have proposed to the Codex Alimentarius Committee that no country should be able to require mandatory GMO labelling of food items. The FDA and USDA say that mandatory labelling is "false, misleading, and deceptive" because it implies that there is a difference between GMO and non-GMO ingredients. Ultimately, the FDA and USDA want to do away with product labelling standards overall, trusting corporations to keep to the necessary health standards.

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21. Lyme Disease: An Emerging Epidemic

The epidemic of Lyme disease is one of the most political and controversial epidemics of our time. Lyme disease originates from a bacterium transmitted through the bite of a tick and can remain hidden, mimicking diseases such as multiple sclerosis, ALS, ADHD and other neurological conditions. New cases of Lyme disease occur each year at a rate 10 times higher than that of AIDS and the West Nile virus combined.

Current Lyme disease treatment guidelines were developed by the Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSA), a group associated with pharmaceutical, insurance and university interests that are profiting from the diagnostic criteria, vaccines and

recommended treatments for Lyme disease. These guidelines, endorsed by the National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Disease Control, define the treatment of Lyme as a two-to-four-week course of antibiotic therapy.

Physicians who believe that Lyme disease is a more chronic condition needing long-term treatment risk losing their medical licence for treating patients outside IDSA guidelines. Insurance companies refuse to pay for longer treatments despite evidence that illustrates the chronic nature of the condition and the effectiveness of long-term therapies. This leaves thousands of Lyme disease patients suffering because a commercialised medical community won't acknowledge the chronic nature of their illness, and the public uneducated about a growing epidemic.

22. Participatory Budgeting: Empowering Citizens

Participatory Budgeting (PB) is a process that allows citizens to decide directly how to allocate all or part of a public budget, typically through a series of meetings, work by community "delegates" or representatives and ultimately a final vote. It was first implemented in the city of Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 1990, and has since spread.

PB has recently taken root in Canadian and American soils. Chicago's 49th Ward, for example, uses this process to distribute \$1.3 million of annual discretionary funds. The ward's residents have praised the opportunity to make meaningful decisions, take ownership over the budget process and win concrete improvements for their neighbourhood, e.g., community gardens, sidewalk repairs, street lights and public murals. The initiative proved so popular that the ward's alderman, Joe Moore, credits PB with helping to reverse his political fortunes. The wave is not stopping in Chicago, either. Elected officials and community leaders elsewhere, such as in New York and San Francisco, are considering launching similar initiatives.

23. Movement to Ban Plastic Bags

Shoppers worldwide are using 500 billion to one trillion single-use plastic bags per year. The average use-time of a plastic bag is 12 minutes. Plastic bags pollute our waters, smother wetlands and entangle and kill animals. This eventually affects our health because larger animals eat small plastic-laden creatures, and plastics work their way up the food chain until we consume animals that have eaten some form of plastic. Plastic is non-biodegradable and is made from a non-renewable resource: oil. An estimated three million barrels of oil are needed to produce the 19 billion plastic bags used annually in California.

Now 35 countries have already banned the use of plastic bags, nine countries have passed levies and fees on their use, 12 countries are considering bans or fees, and 26 states in the USA have introduced a form of legislation concerning plastic bag use.

Most plastic contains harmful chemicals like bisphenol A and phthalates, which are unsafe for human use. These can be avoided by substituting plastic materials and products with other alternative materials like reusable cloth bags, stainless-steel water bottles and wooden, glass and metal substitutes.

24. South Dakota: The Top Anti-Abortion State

South Dakota is taking extreme action against any person who performs an abortion within the state's borders. The South Dakota House is taking up a bill to redefine "justifiable homicide" that may "make it legal to kill doctors who perform abortions", *Mother Jones* reports. The bill, which is backed by the GOP in theory, could allow a woman's father, mother, son, daughter or husband to kill anyone who tried to provide that woman with an abortion, even if she wanted the procedure.

In 1994, the state banned abortion providers inside its borders. "Planned Parenthood flies a doctor in from out-of-state once a week to see patients at a Sioux Falls clinic. Women from the more remote parts of the large, rural state drive up to six hours to reach this lone clinic" and must "receive counseling and wait 24 hours before undergoing the procedure".

GOP (Republican) lawmakers at the state and federal level have come up with four other radical abortion restrictions to marginalise women's rights and eradicate choice. Through such inflexible attachment to pro-life policies, the GOP subordinates the choices and lives of women to a narrow-minded and impracticable philosophy.

GOP state lawmakers in Arizona and Ohio have unveiled so-called "Heartbeat Bills" to "prohibit women from ending pregnancies at the first detectable fetal heartbeat". The heartbeat can be heard "within 18 to 24 days of conception" and "in almost all cases by six weeks"—a period in which "many women don't even know they're pregnant".

Texas Governor Rick Perry (R) "fast-tracked" an anti-abortion bill, mandating that "pregnant women be shown an ultrasound of the fetus at least two hours before an abortion". Physicians would have to show the foetus's dimensions, limbs or internal organs, and, if audible, the foetal heartbeat.

Arizona GOP Rep. Steve Montenegro actually introduced bills to criminalise abortions if they're sought because of race or sex. The bill would charge doctors with a Class 3 felony if they "knowingly perform abortions for these reasons".

On the federal level, House Republicans took the first two months of 2011 to marginalise the rights of women. First, they tried to exclude certain victims—including women who are drugged, women who do not physically

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fight off the offender, and some minors—from abortion coverage by redefining rape.

Rep. Joe Pitts (R-PA) then introduced the "Protect Life Act", a bill that would "give doctors the green light to let pregnant women die if they have a life-threatening condition and need an emergency abortion".

25. DU Planned for Libya?

President Obama's undeclared and congressionally unauthorised war against Libya may be compounded by the crime of spreading toxic uranium oxide in populated areas of that country.

Concern is being voiced by groups, such as the International Coalition to Ban Uranium Weapons, which monitor the military use of so-called depleted-uranium (DU) anti-tank

and bunker-penetrating shells.

As of late March 2011, the US has not introduced its A-10 Thunderbolts, known also as *Warthogs*, into the Libyan campaign, probably because these subsonic straight-wing craft, while heavily armoured, are vulnerable to shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles which Libyan forces are known to possess in large numbers.

Once the air-control situation is improved by continued bombardment, however, these specialised ground-attack aircraft will probably be added to the forces. The A-10 has a particularly large automatic cannon which fires an unusually large 30-mm shell. These shells are often fitted with solid uranium projectiles.

A-10s were heavily used in the Balkans conflict, and Kosovo officials were dismayed to learn that 11 tons of uranium weapons had been fired

there, leaving dangerous uranium dust fallout in their wake.

The US military is fond of DU weapons because the material, made from uranium from which the fissionable U-235 has been removed, is extremely heavy and, in alloy form, is also extremely hard.

Because of DU's mass, projectiles made from the material can penetrate even the heaviest armour. Then, in the heat caused by the collision with an object, the uranium bursts into flame at extreme heat, causing an explosive (and toxic) inferno inside a tank or other vehicle.

Soldiers inside a target vehicle are incinerated. The problem is that the resulting uranium oxide produced by such explosions, besides being highly toxic, is a microscopic alpha-emitter, which if inhaled or ingested by humans is extremely carcinogenic and mutagenic. ∞