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Reclaiming Public Interest in Power

The Corporate/Populist Yin and Yang of Montana Politics

KEN TOOLE

The struggle between revitalized progressive forces in Montana and the powerful right wing is literally a fight for power—electric power. The most recent chapter in this fight concerns a populist coalition’s attempt to reclaim not only the regulation of a hydroelectric dam but also the ability to frame ideology and issues that are central to progressive values. And the strategic engagement in this fight shows how the pendulum of political power swings back and forth based on clear strategy and grassroots mobilization.

Montana has not been a traditionally conservative state. Historically, Montana has a strong farm/labor populist tradition. In many ways, the heart of the labor movement can be found in the copper mines of Butte, Montana. From the turn of the twentieth century, Montana has elected a string of progressive leaders, and in 1972 adopted one of the most progressive constitutions in the country.

But Montana has also experienced aggressive corporate exploitation of its natural resources and its people. Butte, home of the “richest hill on earth,” was stripped clean by a series of corporate robber barons ranging from home grown capitalists to the Rockefellers and Standard Oil. The wealth from the mines largely flowed back east. Now the once-rich mines have been exhausted, leaving unemployment and poverty in their wake—as well as one of the largest superfund sites in the country in Butte and the Clark Fork River.

Today Montana’s economy is in transition. The super rich and celebrity crowd have discovered Montana’s open spaces. Along with that, Montana is a destination point of the “white flight migration” from urban areas which is bringing both increasingly conservative political perspectives and more investment and retirement income. Natural resource extraction is now less than 5% of the total economy. It is being replaced by service-oriented economic activity.

MT Progressives & the Resurgent Right
Throughout the late 1970s and 1980s, progressive politics in Montana was dominated by a multi-constituent coalition comprised of labor, conservationists, Native Americans, women’s groups, low-income people and others. This coalition was called the Montana Alliance for Progressive Policy (MAPP). It had an affiliated PAC called the Montana Committee for an Effective Legislature (MontCEL). In fact, MAPP/MontCEL provided the model for similar coalitions which are now in existence across the country and dominate the progressive landscape as the model for political action.

In the mid 1990s, this coalition began a period of decline as the power of the right came to dominate Montana’s political landscape. Repeated efforts to rejuvenate MAPP/MontCEL failed, and individual constituent groups focused themselves on their own core issues. At the same time, infighting broke out among some groups, creating an environment which simply could not sustain coalition work. By 1998, MAPP/MontCEL closed its doors, leaving a void which has not been filled to this day.

During this time, one of MAPP’s member groups—the Montana Human Rights Network (a RESIST grantee)—was deve...
Reclaiming Public Interest in Power

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opposing as a “fight-the-Right” group, conducting research and exposure work on various aspects of the right wing in Montana from the Militia of Montana to the Christian Coalition. Much of the Network’s research focused on the ideology, mobilization strategies and institutional structures of the right wing. The Network came to believe that the Right’s model of activism was more consciously ideological than that of progressives, enabling them to transcend issue- and constituent-based activism. The Right had certain institutions which progressives either did not have or were not using effectively. Most important in that regard was the Right’s ability to define the terms of public debate using “think tanks” to promote its ideological agenda.

The Network also concluded that, as the Right was pushing more and more policy decision-making to the state level, it was also developing state-level policy initiatives. These initiatives relied on a network of state-based think tanks and national organizations focused on state-level policy-making. The Right was pushing for individual states to become the battle grounds for its ideological agenda while simultaneously and systematically building the infrastructure to support that strategy. The progressive response was, and remains, spotty across the country.

The Montana Human Rights Network responded by working to create the Policy Institute. The intent was to form a state-based “think tank” that would identify specific issues which could be used to formulate broader public debate. Such debate could promote progressive values and help build a base for a broader progressive vision. One of its first projects was participating in a ballot initiative in the 2002 election focused on energy reform.

Anti-corporate Populism Returns
In 1997, Montana deregulated its largest electric utility, the Montana Power Company. Shortly after being deregulated, Montana Power sold its hydroelectric dams and coal generating plants to Pennsylvania Power and Light (PPL), a huge transnational corporation with operations in Europe, Latin America and the US. Montanans lost all of the benefits provided by low-cost, hydroelectric dams in the state, and rates began to climb. It was an economic disaster.

Progressive Montanans used the ballot initiative to frame the debate to include issues of access to water.

Working with the Montana Public Interest Research Group, Working for Equality and Economic Liberation (another RESIST grantee), the Progressive Labor Caucus and the Montana Senior Citizen Association, the Policy Institute developed ballot initiative language which called for state condemnation of the hydroelectric dams across the state. It also called for rates based on cost of production, not market price.

The coalition working on the initiative understood that the campaign was not likely to succeed given that PPL Global had virtually unlimited resources, and none were so naive as to think that money wouldn’t matter in this kind of campaign. In the end, the initiative was defeated after PPL spent some $3 million, an unheard of amount in a Montana election.

But the initiative provided progressives with a clear opportunity to frame public debate to include corporate accountability, business ethics and community values. The campaign dominated the news throughout the election, eclipsing even the US Senate race in Montana. Progressive activists were quoted across the state, driving home a strong populist, anti-corporate message in community after community.

Additionally, the ballot initiative helped develop a donor and activist list which could then be circulated to progressive groups who have used it to solicit financial support and members. The State Democratic Party (which stayed out of the utility debate in the 2002 elections) is now promoting an energy policy based on the work of the Policy Institute. In summary, the initiative was used precisely as the Right has used similar policy initiatives to drive public debate, sway existing political institutions and to help build a grassroots base of support.

Where to next?
The Policy Institute is now working with a group called the Fair Share Coalition on developing a progressive tax reform package. Building on an idea presented by the Progressive Labor Caucus, the Policy Institute is developing a campaign to promote a tax on the gross receipts of “big box” stores. This proposal once again focuses on economic issues, community values and corporate accountability. And once again, it gives progressives the opportunity to frame the debate on our terms, it highlights the divergent interests of local business versus transnational corporations, building our base and promoting our values.

Progressives need to develop more state-based institutions to counter the Right. More importantly, progressives need to develop ways to reach beyond issue-specific and constituent based-models for building political power and start engaging the ideological- and values-based organizing model of the Right.

Ken Toole is the president of the board of the Policy Institute, which received a grant from RESIST this year. For more information, contact them at PO Box 1362, Helena, MT 59601; network@mhrn.org.

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Business Tries to Make Crime Pay

A Western Perspective on Prison Privatization

SCOT NAKAGAWA

The "tough on crime" movement is among the most important racial and economic justice crises of our time. Politically driven mandatory incarceration targets specific crimes in minority communities, while largely ignoring dominantly white crimes. If current incarceration rates hold, one of every three African American males will go to prison in his lifetime. Latinos and Native American communities are also disproportionately affected.

The growth of prisons is not driven by increasing crime rates. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI), violent crime has dropped since 1973, and property crimes dropped 6% between 1973 and 2001. Instead, a number of other factors appear to be driving growth. Principle among these is the rise in manipulative media coverage of crime, and opportunist “tough on crime” politicking. Responding to public fears with a conservative, racialized agenda, policy makers are increasingly choosing prisons over social programs when making difficult budget decisions (see statistics below for examples).

Making Crime Pay, for Corporations...

In addition, the growing influence of private prison corporations with vested interests in increasing rates of imprisonment has also made a difference. In 1987, 3,122 prisoners were held in private facilities. In 2001, the number of beds in privately run adult prisons topped 142,500. Private prison corporations have used two key strategies to achieve this "success": 1) political campaign contributions, and 2) ideologically-loaded model legislation shaped by the same private interests who stand to profit from prison growth.

States and the federal government are the primary clients of private prison companies. Unlike many other corrections issues, where corrections professionals determine the approach, the key decision-makers on privatization are elected legislators and governors who pass corrections department appropriations and sentencing legislation. At the federal level, we have Congress and the U.S. Dept. of Justice to thank for what is, in effect, a major corporate subsidy program. As a result, politics, not good public policy, has become even more of a factor in the incarceration boom.

While the move toward prison privatization has strong financial backing, it is by no means inevitable. Well-organized grassroots opposition can make a real difference. In the western region, a successful campaign in Utah offers some inspiration and guidance.

Stopping the Westward Prison Expansion

In 1998, without public input, Utah approved $2 million in seed funding for site evaluation for a 500-1,000 bed private prison. In response, a small group of grassroots activists formed the Citizens Education Project (CEP) to fight prison privatization. Working in a coalition including such unlikely allies as the Mormon Church and the Utah Sheriff's Association, CEP pressured legislators and the Department of Corrections to hold hearings on the privatization plan. They simultaneously initiated a successful media campaign that raised questions about prison privatization.

By March 1999, when Utah Governor Leavitt signed House Bill 131 authorizing the Department of Corrections to contract with private prison companies, CEP had stirred up enough controversy to force a partial reassessment of the private prison plan by the Utah legislature. In that same session, CEP led a successful effort to enact a bill prohibiting importation of out-of-state prisoners to any Utah private prison (diminishing the prospects of future corporate profits).

CEP traveled the state providing information and advice to activists in towns being considered for the new prison. By focusing public attention on lack of public input into the decision to move toward privatization, CEP was able to open the door to debate on the issue.

Community members in targeted towns learned that privatization does not save state money and private prisons could cause the loss of better paying state jobs, among other problems. Residents of two counties rallied against prison proposals at public hearings. By early 1999, residents of Fillmore were able to force a referendum and voted down the prison, and activists in Duschesne County effectively blocked the prison there.

In June 1999 the state accepted the bid

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A Sample of Statistics

The US is engaged in the largest prison build-up in recorded history. Under the "tough on crime" banner, policy makers have quadrupled the prison population over the last 20 years. Here are some numbers:

• The number of people incarcerated in the US has now risen above 2.1 million.
• 1 out of every 143 US residents is either incarcerated or under criminal justice supervision
• 1 in 37 US residents has served time in prison.
• The vast majority of prisoners are low-income and nearly half are only marginally employed at the time of their arrest.
• African Americans account for 45.6% of prisoners and only 12.7% of the overall population. Together, African Americans and Latinos constituted a majority of those who had ever served time by the end of 2002.
• In the state of Washington, felon disenfranchisement laws bar 24% of African-American males from voting.
• General fund expenditures for higher education in Oregon increased just 64% between 1985 and 2000, while prison spending increased by 314% during the same time period.

For source information, see The Prison Payoff, a publication of the Western Prison Education Project, www.westernstatescenter.org/archive/ppayoff.pdf.
Public Housing Not for Sale

Sisters in Action for Power Demand Land Equity

DARLENE LOMBOS

Jack and Jill
Went up the hill
In need of public housing.
HOPE VI* came down,
Displaced the town,
And privatization came right after.
—Sisters in Action for Power

A long-standing history of redlining, disinvestment and “urban removal” left communities in North and Northeast Portland economically distressed of prior decades. Nonetheless, many low-income families and people of color found a place to rent, even a home or a business to buy. But now housing costs have nearly doubled in the last five years. As a result, low-income renters and homeowners have been priced out of the neighborhoods where they have lived for more than 30 years. Gentrification is at its peak: Upscale wine and coffee shops have replaced social clubs and clothing stores owned by people of color. High-end galleries featuring traditional African art have pushed out hair and nail salons. Ironically, as huge numbers of people of color are displaced, billboards now market galleries featuring traditional African art.

Members of Sisters in Action for Power are ready to take on big business. Photo courtesy of Sisters in Action

*HOPE VI is a federal program created to improve and “revitalize” public housing, but instead has accelerated its loss. By promoting “mixed-income communities,” previous public housing has been redeveloped into market rentals.

Prison Pay-off,

General was asked to re-examine the contract numbers to determine why the state would want to pay more than necessary to house inmates in a private facility. Contract negotiations with Cornell, however, remained ongoing.

In July 2000, Utah Department of Corrections said that there “may very well be a prison by 2005, perhaps even before that.” But by mid-August, plans for the private prison were completely scrapped in favor of renting beds from jails in Beaver and Millard counties.

“The decision was made to abandon the privatized prison and the basic reason for this is, it’s just not fiscally attractive at this time,” said the Director of the Utah Department of Corrections. Cornell Corrections received notice that the deal was being terminated via a fax from the Department on August 15th. The opposition to private prisons had succeeded in Utah.

Prison privatization represents just one battle in a much broader struggle, but it is an important one to take on. The prison industrial complex has already done much to dehumanize prisoners, but privatization takes it a step further by putting more of a profit motive into “tough on crime” policies that ensure a ready supply of prisoners.

Scot Nakagawa is a staff member at the Western Prison Project, which received a grant from RESIST this year. His article is adapted from The Prison Pay-off, a publication of the Western Prison Project and the Western States Center, by Brigette Sarabi and Ed Bender. For more information and a copy of the Prison Pay-off, contact the Western Prison Project, PO Box 40085, Portland, OR 97240; www.westernprisonproject.org.
over critical thinking and community building. Today, we see the important gains made by powerful people’s movements in the last century have come under attack. Public sector jobs are being contracted out to private companies and public dollars spent to build private prisons. We see social security funds headed towards Wall Street. And we see the sale of public land to private developers.

All of these things are being done under the illusion that the private sector can do things better, cheaper and more efficiently than government. This illusion is manufactured, marketed and sold to our communities in pretty packages that promise: “new and improved,” “more efficient,” “better returns,” and “revitalization.” Of course, as with most consumer products these days, it’s all packaging, and we are still left with low wages, high unemployment, systematic civil rights abuses, and an eroding safety net.

Sisters in Action recognizes that challenging the false promises of market-driven solutions to social problems is just as important as confronting those who work hand-in-hand to privatize our once sacred public institutions. This means we must consciously address dominant culture and its effects on our communities thoughtfully, strategically and deliberately when organizing issue campaigns. It has forced us to think of new tactics that reframe issues, popularize our politics and provide alternative information at a grass-roots level to promote critical thinking.

For example, this past summer over 100 community residents gathered for an afternoon of political prose, live music, and some good old-fashioned home-cookin’. We staged the event in part of our neighborhood that has been marketed as the “Alberta Arts District,” complete with wine shops, upscale art galleries and doggy daycares. During one of the new monthly art walks that invite crowds of Portlanders to “discover” our community, youth, public housing residents and local business owners testified to longtime residents about the depletion of public housing, attacks on public schools, and the displacement of people who have lived and worked in the North/Northeast community for decades. A mock gameshow asked, “Who’s Gonna be a Millionaire?” and revealed who really benefits from the sale of public land and so-called revitalization. From a simulated float cruising up and down the main drag, youth recruited game show contestants and displayed signs reading “Our Public Schools are Not for Sale” and “HOPE VI is False Hope.”

In our Land Equity Campaign, Sisters in Action combines consciousness-raising activities like these with direct action. So far, we have forced the Housing Authority of Portland to publish an accessible HOPE VI information brochure written by Sisters in Action members who live in public housing, and are continuing to demand 1-for-1 replacement for every public housing unit torn down. In addition, we will continue to uncover the mask of revitalization and promote critical thinking and collective responses to the devastating realities of privatization.

Darlene Lombos is the lead organizer of Sisters in Action for Power, a former RESIST grantee. For more information, contact Sisters in Action for Power, 1732 NE Alberta, Portland, OR 97211.

Public Systems Efficient

The evidence—including data in World Bank publications—indicates that well-run public sector systems, like the Social Security system in the United States, are far more efficient than privatized systems. The administrative cost of the U.S. Social Security system is less than 0.8 percent of the amount paid out in benefits each year. By contrast, systems of individual accounts, like those in place in England or Chile, have administrative expenses that are equal to 15-20 percent of annual benefits.

These administrative costs come directly out of the money that retirees would otherwise receive, lowering their retirement benefits by as much as one-third, compared with a well-run public Social Security system. The administrative expenses that are drained out of workers’ savings in a privatized system are the fees and commissions to the financial industry, which explains its interest in promoting privatization in the United States and elsewhere. (US firms like Merrill Lynch have been some of the big beneficiaries of Social Security privatization in developing nations such as Chile.)

Switching to individual accounts will put the disability and survivors’ portion of the Social Security programs in jeopardy. These programs are especially important to African Americans, who are nearly twice as likely to receive disability or survivors’ benefits as whites.

Education: an Investment Opportunity

- The US spends $324 billion on public K-12 education every year.
- The investment banking firm of Lehman Brothers predicts that public education in North and South America will be privatized over the next decade, and that this will be extremely profitable.
- 21 for-profit EMOs (educational management organizations) are now managing 285 schools in 22 states.
- Over the past five years, for-profit Edison Schools Inc. has won contracts to run more than 100 schools with 57,000 students nationwide—as large altogether as the school district in Cincinnati or Atlanta.

The information above is excerpted from Our Communities Are Not for Sale: Local/Global Links in the Fights Against Privatization, published by United for a Fair Economy (see page 8).
Sacred Site Saved from Utility Plan
Zuni Salt Lake Coalition and Tribal Efforts Win Epic Struggle

JAIME CHAVEZ

The fight to save Zuni Salt Lake was a true “David and Goliath” situation, pitting the third largest electric utility in the United States against the Zuni tribe of New Mexico and Arizona. Only through a multi-level organizing campaign was the Zuni tribe able to succeed in stopping Salt River Project (SRP) from destroying fragile Zuni Salt Lake—a sacred site that is fed by an aquifer threatened by the proposed development (see page 7 for more information).

After decades of struggle, the Zuni tribe reached out for help from tribes throughout the region, environmental groups, churches and community organizations. The Zuni Salt Lake Coalition formed in October, 2001. The beauty of this campaign was that when this alliance was created, the tribe was ready to take a chance on collaborating with a grassroots organizing effort. Water Information Network, a longtime RESIST grantee, was one of the founding members of the Coalition and helped provide organizing expertise.

More Than the Sum of Our Parts
Members of the Coalition and the Zuni nation coordinated efforts to challenge the utility giant, working together to shift the media attention, mobilize groups, and leverage pressure.

We avoided the media straightjacket in Phoenix—home of the notoriously conservative Arizona Republic—and expanded our outreach, projecting a field campaign from the offices of our coalition partners in Washington, Denver, Albuquerque, Flagstaff and Tucson. Even national media, including the History Channel, aired clips on the importance of Zuni Salt Lake. Additionally, we gathered petitions, which were then blast-faxed to the Department of the Interior and SRP. This helped to stall the granting of mining permits while we continued to build resistance. With ongoing pressure, SRP came to know that the campaign was serious and posed a credible threat.

ZSLC was conscious about recruitment and, in a short time, broadened the support from tribes, church leadership, environmentalists and community-based organizations to act on the local, regional and international level.

As a result of these organizing efforts, the National Trust for Historic Preservation declared Zuni Salt Lake the eleventh most endangered area in the country. This designation helped to further increase national attention.

Taking it to the Streets
In July of 2002, runners from Phoenix and grassroots organizations like Tonatierre joined runners from the Hopi Nation and Zuni Pueblo in a 300 mile, three-day run. The Hopi are also connected to Zuni Salt Lake and offered their full support. One member of the Hopi said, “We must stand together and unify in defense of our sacred places.” This dynamic of collaboration out of self-preservation was a key dynamic in forming a powerful alliance. This demonstration of a powerful local base provided the background for expanding the issue to the national level.

We took the fight to Phoenix on Columbus Day last year, where nearly 200 indigenous people and allies called on SRP’s CEO to stop targeting native sacred lands. The objectives were crystal clear: We had to figure out how to short circuit SRP. The old axiom of “it is not what you have but what they think you have” still applies. This was not just an environmentalist driven campaign; it was much deeper. We knew we needed to organize visible power in New Mexico to match our actions in Arizona. We were able to organize actions in Santa Fe and Albuquerque, and already had uncovering seven burial sites along the proposed rail line. The desecration of a sacred burial site did not fit well with the “stewardship” image SRP tries to project.

To take advantage of this vulnerability, ZSLC organized a 500-person public testimonial at Zuni. The action was led by a youth-driven 40-person core group that helped bring together many sectors of Zuni society. This was the first major public meeting about the mine held at Zuni. Approximately 100 oral and written testimonies were submitted with the common goal of stopping SRP and protecting the sacred Salt Lake. Neighboring tribal leadership from Acoma and Laguna testified, the New Mexico press projected the need to protect the sacred, and the elders and youth stood up in defense of Salt Mother.

A consolidated Zuni people and their allies forced the utility giant to yield to the pressure of the united coalition, ensuring victory for the Zuni and their allies. At the news conference right after the victory, Zuni Councilman Arden Kukate stated that, “it is a victory for Salt Woman, a victory that permits all these people to continue utilizing her flesh and her water for our longevity and our prosperity.”

Quite powerfully, at the end of the testimonial a double rainbow filled the sky—a fitting sign after a long and spiritual struggle by the Zuni people and allies.

Lessons Learned
Through our organizing, we were able to achieve a victory that sent a chill up the continued on page seven
Sacred Site Saved from Utility Plan

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spine of industry. We reached critical mass and SRP decided to pull out. The legal threats from the tribe and from the Coalition were credible and amazingly never dominated or collided with our organizing track. We never had to use these threats and were able to build a solid model of dynamic collaboration outside SRP’s normal experience. We were able to stop Bush-era environmental rollbacks against nearly impossible odds and showed that with a good power analysis, solid allies and the capacity to move communities to act, we could build formidable resistance. For now, Salt Woman is protected from the threat of a coal-strip mine. But other threats by oil and gas interests will continue to loom until a plan for permanent protection of the Sanctuary Zone, the Zuni Salt Lake and the fragile aquifers that feed it become a reality.

Jaime Chavez is an organizer with the Water Information Network, a RESIST multi-year grantees. WIN is a member of the Zuni Salt Lake Coalition. For more information, contact WIN, PO Box 4524, Albuquerque, NM 87106; www.zunisaltlakecoalition.org.

**Zuni Win Battle to Save Salt Mother**

**BRIAN LALIO**

Over two-decades of battle to preserve the home of Ma’lokkyattsik’i (Salt Mother), a central deity to Zuni culture, has finally come to an end. Salt River Project (SRP) announced on August 4, 2003, they cancelled plans to build an 18,000-acre open-steel Fence Lake Coal Mine.

**History of Salt River Project**

Salt River Project planned to strip-mine over 80 million tons of coal for an estimated 40-50 years. The construction of a 44-mile rail-line would carry coal from the proposed mine to the Consolano Generating Station in St. Johns, AZ. In the Phoenix area, SRP serves approximately 800,000 customers. Though Zuni Salt Lake fluctuates between 1.5 and 4 feet in depth, SRP planned to pump 85 gallons of water per minute from the Atarque Aquifer.

Salt River Project’s Board of Directors voted to enter into contract with Powder River Basin in Wyoming. According to a SRP press release, the company will now relinquish permits and coal leases back to the state and federal regulatory agencies.

Fence Lake Coal Mine, which has been in the works since 1981, has faced increasing opposition from native tribes, environmental groups, churches and community groups (see article on page 6).

**Cultural Significance of Zuni Salt Lake**

Preliminary survey work for the rail-line resulted in SRP unearthing seven human remains, currently still in the possession of SRP. Over 500 human burial remains are located within the area.

Cal Seciwa, Zuni Salt Lake Coalition member, stated, “Those bodies need to be reburied where SRP found them before SRP walks away completely in order to respect our ancestors.”

“SRP had to be very careful and project an image of stewardship. In the case of Zuni, this was not an image of stewardship. This was an issue of cultural destruction that would have left behind SRP a tale and a legacy of shame,” said Jaime Chavez, Zuni Salt Lake Coalition member.

Over the two decades of battle, SRP had to be very careful and project an image of stewardship. In the case of Zuni, this was not an image of stewardship. This was an issue of cultural destruction that would have left behind SRP a tale and a legacy of shame,” said Jaime Chavez, Zuni Salt Lake Coalition member.

Earlier this summer, the National Trust for Historic Preservation listed the Zuni Salt Lake in their 2003 list of “America’s 11 Most Endangered Historic Places.”

**Significance of Victory**

The Zuni Salt Lake Coalition received support from hundreds of people across the country. With their added voices, ZSLC maintained ongoing campaigns to stop the Fence Lake Coal Mine. On July 19, 2003, the ZSLC hosted “The People’s Hearing” in Zuni, where over 500 people attended to give testimony for the protection of Zuni Salt Lake.

“So many people have supported us in this struggle and there is no word that can express our appreciation. It has been 20 years of mental anguish,” said Head Councilman Carlton Albert, Sr.

On August 7, 2003 the Pueblo of Zuni held a press conference at the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center in Albuquerque, NM. Governor Arlen Quetawki publicly thanked all those individuals for assisting the Pueblo of Zuni to stop SRP stating, “This is a victory for all Native Americans.”

SRP’s decision to pull out sets a major example for Indigenous tribes that protection of sacred sites can be achieved. As Councilman Albert indicated, it will have a “ripple effect.”

Though the two decades of ongoing battle have been exhausting, the victory serves as a learning process for future generations to remember. The Zuni Salt Lake issue is an educational source for young people to learn and remember that the future is uncertain. “Have faith in yourself and your religion. Our religion is the backbone of our livelihoods. Longevity and prosperity are gifts of life, as long as our children keep it alive,” said Councilman Arden Kucate.

**The Future of Zuni Salt Lake**

This battle has come to an end. However, there is still much work that needs to be done to finalize the close-out to ensure another incident, such as the case of SRP, will not occur again.

For the long-term, Councilman Kucate indicted the Zuni Tribal Council will utilize all avenues to protect the Zuni Salt Lake and the Sanctuary Zone. The home of Ma’lokkyattsik’i (Salt Mother) will remain undisturbed for future generations.

Brian Lalio is a Zuni Pueblo member and former publisher of the Shiwi Messenger.
Privatization threatens our multi-billion-dollar health care system. One of our health care safety nets is the nation's network of public hospitals, which care for patients even when they cannot pay. Yet this crucial institution, upon which 44 million uninsured Americans depend, is in peril. Private corporations are replacing public hospitals through leases, mergers, and closures.

- For every 100 public hospitals, one is closing and two are converting to private ownership annually.
- From 1975 to 1999 America lost one-third of its public hospitals.

Without public hospitals and public health insurance, care is rationed on the basis of wealth. Those who can pay or who have the best insurance get the best care: the rich have more of a "right to life" than the poor. The health care industry, under the slogan that marketplace competition is the key to improvement, is replacing public and community hospitals with private ones.

DC General: In the Nation's Capital

In June 2001, one leading American hospital, DC General, joined the privatization trend. Washington has an acute need for public hospitals. Black men there have a life expectancy of 58 years or less, lower than for any other nation in this hemisphere except for Haiti. One in six District of Columbia residents is uninsured. DC General and its clinics served 30,000 uninsured people and provided one-third of all uncompensated care in the District.

Despite community efforts to save the hospital, the mayor and the Financial Control Board, which Congress appoints, pushed the privatization deal through. A few weeks after the partial closure of DC General, the Washington Times reported that "anecdotal information shows the closure has overwhelmed hospital capacity around the city, and put the health needs of patients at risk."

Hospital Privatization: Trends & Results

The case of DC General illustrates the need for public hospitals and the harmful ways that privatization destroys community access, stability, services, and control.

Instability: Half of the private for-profit hospitals that were in business in 1980 had closed 17 years later, while only 10 percent of public hospitals failed during the same 17 years. The short lifespan of private hospitals hurts communities because one-third of a hospital's patients cease to seek inpatient care for some time after their hospital closes.

Decreased Access: Public hospitals provide twice as much care to uninsured people as private hospitals, and they are usually located where the care is most needed. A 1993 Tennessee study concluded that the median level of care provided to uninsured and underinsured patients by all the state's hospitals amounted to 8.9 percent of revenue. Tennessee hospitals run by the for-profit Columbia/HCA corporation spent as little as 1.8 percent of revenue on this type of patient.

Loss of Services: Private hospitals often discontinue expensive services (like intensive, cardiac and inpatient psychiatric care) to save money. Catholic hospitals have also cut reproductive health care. When public hospitals disappear, communities lose crucial health care options.

Loss of Control: Private hospital managers invariably exclude the public from decisions that affect their community. With DC General, the exclusion began by not releasing information about the hospital's merger, lease, or closure. Hospital managers become more secretive after privatization and information becomes less publicly available. Community representatives are commonly replaced by senior hospital management on the hospital board, increasing the disconnect between hospital and community. With for-profits, public interests sometimes take a back seat to the interests of shareholders.

Various cities and states are establishing standards to manage conversion. Even after privatization, however, control remains one of a community's most valuable tools. Communities whose hospitals have already converted should increase regulation and community involvement to enhance stability and access to the services they need.

This article is excerpted from Our Communities Are Not for Sale: Local-Global Links in the Fights Against Privatization, published by United for a Fair Economy. For more information, including this document, contact UFE, 37 Temple Place, Boston, MA 02111; www.faireconomy.org/privatization.