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Editor's Note

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Editor's Note

Padraig O'Malley

We launched the *New England Journal of Public Policy* (NEJPP) in 1985 when Edmund Beard was director of the then-John W. McCormack Institute of Public Affairs. An Institute Senior Fellow at the time, I was founding editor and continued in that capacity until the last issue was published in 2007.

We remained closed over the last 6 years for all the usual reasons, which are encapsulated in one word: money, or rather lack thereof.

We now resume publication of the *Journal* in an online form, and invite you to scroll through different issues to get some idea of the breadth of our interests. Most of all, we invite you to read the forthcoming issues, give us feedback, and help us in the search for authors whose work you believe should receive consideration for publication.

But first, long overdue acknowledgement of the contribution of the dedicated people who worked in some capacity on the Journal over its print life span: Ed Beard who made the publication possible and stuck with the journal through thick and thin—and there were many days when there was lot of thin; in order of “appearance” as copy editors/managing editors/design coordinators: Toni-Jean Rosenberg, Betsy Anne Youngholm, Candace Chick, Patricia Dal Ponte, the late Geraldine C. Morse, Shaun O’Connell, Erika White, Matthew Vasconcellos, Sheila Gagnon and last, but by no measure least, the indefatigable Pat Peterson who turned a lot of bad prose into good copy; and a special expression of appreciation to Andrew Elder, Digital Archives and Outreach Librarian of Healey Library at UMass Boston—for his diligence in turning the entire series of the print copies into digital form, and in that sense bringing us back from the dead.

We welcome you and hope you will enjoy the ten articles in this first issue, which are a compilation of some of the best we previously published. Due to time-sensitive developments, a few authors reviewed their earlier work and added a brief post-script. The republished contributions represent a diverse array of economic, public health, peace and justice, and public policy concerns, with our traditional fillip of literary reflection. They include: Robert Reich, “The Future of Learning”; Chuck Collins, “Responding to Growing Disparities of Income and Wealth”; Judith Kurland, “Devolution: The Retreat of Government”; Robert Forrant, “Grinding Decline in Springfield”; Darren Kew, “Seeking Peace in Nigeria’s War-Torn Niger Delta”; Marcy Murnighan, “Common Sense and Civic Virtue: Institutional Investors, Responsible

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Ownership , and the Democratic Ideal”; Loretta McLaughlin, “AIDS: An Overview”; Donald Hall, “Rusticus: Notes on Class and Culture in Rural New Hampshire”; Lars Eighner, “On Dumpster Diving”; and Shaun O’Connell, “Important Places.”

II

In one sense, calling the publication the *New England Journal of Public Policy* (NEJPP) is a misnomer, since we published not only articles dealing with public policy in the New England states, but special issues to which we invited writers from across the world to contribute.

Several of the Special Issues were later published in book form: *The Aids Epidemic: Private Rights and the Public Interest* (Beacon Press, 1989); *Women and Economic Empowerment* (University of Massachusetts Press, 1990); *Homelessness: New England and Beyond* (University of Massachusetts Press, 1992); and our final issue, “*Climate, Water and Oil*”, later republished as *Sticks and Stones, Living with Uncertain Wars* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2006).

Our purpose was to draw a bandwidth of inquiry not only in relation to public policy issues but to associate them with the different social sciences.

We published James Carroll, and he later used the article in his memoir, *American Requiem: God, My Father and the War that Came Between Us*, which won the National Book Award in 1996. We also published renowned American writers, like Donald Hall, among America’s best and in every issue, Shaun O’Connell masterly reviewed several books, ranging across multiple subjects—pulling their essences together in essays that themselves should be published in book form; such is their scope and virtuosity. We are thrilled that Shaun, once again, will join us and will contribute to each issue.

We were pioneers in some ways. We addressed the subject of AIDS, in a 525 page special edition with contributions from Robert T. Schooley, George A. Lamb, Linette G. Liebling, and James Kinsella, among others, and subsequently hosted a weeklong conference on the issue. We also hosted a conference after the publication of the issues on Homelessness, and a further conference after the publication of the issue addressing poverty. In the Homeless issue we made some breakthroughs, as we invited homeless people themselves to write their narratives, which we published and contributed immensely to their self esteem and sense of self worth.

Our net was always wide and embractive enough that on many occasions we addressed international issues with the same level of scholarship as the articles we published on public policy in the New England states.

The digital age has enabled us to put every issue online, an archive of scholarship spanning twenty years. We hope that we have at least another twenty years to delve into a more complex public policy matrix, interlinked now with the many diverse forms globalization takes. We have passed a turning point in modern history. Today, over 50 percent of global output comes from the east. The tilt to the east will inexorably

continue, redrawing the world's economic map and raising questions: Whither the west? Whither America? Whither our civilization? Momentous and unpredictable change, often random, will be the hallmark of the coming decades. We hope that prospective authors turn their attention to the future we face, not the past, which will be of limited utility as a trajectory to the future. We want authors who will challenge current orthodoxies and offer an alternative: thinking outside the box, not from the sanctuary of being in the box.

Today, many of the problems we face are mired in an obstinate recession that policy makers, both here and in the European Union (EU), have chosen to deal with through austerity measures rather than Keynesian stimuli. Sovereign debt levels wreaked havoc with global financial markets. In the EU, countries totter in crises of unprecedented proportions. The fate of the euro still hangs in the balance, and uncertainty about its future cripples investment and the interrelationships between the euro and the dollar have created interdependencies. What happens in Athens reverberates in New Bedford and Lowell, Youngstown and Pittsburg. What happens in Shanghai reverberates in Massachusetts. We live in a village that keeps shrinking. The recently published report: *The Arab Spring and Climate Change* makes a strong case that the interplay of climate change, food prices (especially wheat) and politics played a significant role in causing the Arab Spring revolutions.¹

The debate in the U.S. to redefine the social safety network will surely see cutbacks in “entitlements” —Medicare and at some point social security as we know it will be redesigned and redefined. Sequestration, mandating deep spending cuts loom and their repercussions will not trickle down to the state and local levels of government, but come gushing in huge swells and with overwhelming impacts.

The paralysis of governance in Washington, DC—where deep ideological differences in Congress, resulted in partisan gridlock, has diminished the power of the presidency in domestic policy making. The reforms seem so obvious even if complicated; the politics truculent and non-responsive.

In many of the most important of the United Nation's Human Development indices, the U.S. now badly lags—in some cases doing no better than middle income countries. The country cries out for a reconstruction of its aging infrastructure to meet the demands of the twenty-first century, while the resources required are systematically cut. In real terms the incomes of middle income families have stagnated for 20 years. Education, once looked on with envy by other nations, is now in tatters. In global educational rankings in such subjects as math and science—the country, once at the apex, is now in the middle ranks. Joblessness is endemic; not just because the economic recovery has been slow, but also because much of the displaced work force does not have the necessary skills. Globalization, technology and demography are redefining the job market, machines are more efficient than people, valued skills become obsolete—a lifetime of working requires a lifetime of learning how to adapt to new environments.

The digital age will transform how we live and work and communicate in ways beyond our imagination.

But that world has to exist.

III

And that world will be inextricably linked with climate change, perhaps the most important global problem, other than the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. CO₂ emissions keep rising at rates well above those forecasted in the seminal Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 1996) and even as we witness their devastating effects—Hurricane Sandy a mere forewarning, we marginalize the issue and there is more talk now on how to adapt to an increasingly warmer planet than on how to curb the emissions that will slow the warming. But, a day of reckoning is at hand and we, as one of the species not immune to many of its devastating consequences will have to adapt in ways we do not yet foresee. We know everything about so much, yet so little about some of the profound issues that will reshape the global community in the next fifty years.

In *Climate, Oil and Water* (Vol. 21, no.2), among the articles on climate change we published was an extract from the Stern Review²—commissioned by the British Government to explore the economics of climate change and warned of imminent catastrophes if the world continued to warm at the rates Sir Nicholas Stern forecasted. That was 2006.

In an interview with the *Guardian* at the January 2013 World Economic Forum in Davos, Stern said: “I underestimated the risks. The planet and the atmosphere seem to be absorbing less carbon than we expected, and emissions are rising pretty strongly. Some of the effects are coming through more quickly than we thought then.”³

The Stern review had estimated a 75 percent chance that global temperatures would rise by between two and three degrees above the long-term average; he now believes we are “on track for something like four.” Had he known the way the situation would evolve, he says, “I think I would have been a bit blunter. I would have been much stronger about the risks of a four or five degree rise.”⁴

Some countries, including China, have begun to grasp the seriousness of the risks, but governments should now act forcefully to shift their economies towards less energy-intensive, more environmentally sustainable technologies.

“This is potentially so dangerous that we have to act strongly” Stern warned again, “do we want to play Russian roulette with two bullets or one? These risks for many people are existential.”⁵

Hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), with exceedingly high levels of CO₂ emissions from coal to traffic, to manufacturing plants to automobiles, are prodigiously emitted from air conditioners and refrigeration.

In countries like India, which swelter with heat for much of the year, an air conditioner is a symbol of making it into the middle class—as people escape poverty they provide themselves with carbon monoxide emitting appliances—not a practice that we

can expect to change any time in the near future. A slew of studies in the last two years confirm conclusively that the planet is warming at a rate dangerously surpassing the benchmarks set out in the IPCC's 1996 study—the temperature at which warming becomes irreversible when warming feeds on warming in an iterative process we cannot control. Scientists are still trying to fathom the complexities of the dynamic, physical, and chemical interactions among the atmosphere, the ocean and other parts of the climate system.

We have to differentiate between *the climate system* and changes in climate that are generated from internal mechanisms within the system.⁶ We are forcing the climate to change but we do not know how the climate will respond. As we do not understand the relationship between the two, we cannot predict when the accumulation of greenhouse gases will create the irreversible.

We only know that global warming is happening: its distribution is uneven but its impacts are beginning to make themselves felt—insufficiently addressed, the impacts will have more threatening consequences in the decades to come that will irreversibly alter the way we live and work and the physical characteristics of the planet and its societal formations, making obsolete the parameters we use to define the sovereignty and boundaries of nation states.⁷ We are drifting, the shore is receding, and at some point the shore is out of reach.

While scientists have known for decades that that the Arctic is warming twice as fast as the rest of the world, and the area that is covered by sea that thaws each summer, then refreezes each winter, has been steadily shrinking.

The rate of melting, however, has soared to unprecedented levels in recent years. Between 1979 and 2000, the area of summer ice was declining by an average of 50,000 sq km - about the size of Costa Rica. From 2001 to 2012, it jumped to 220,000 a year—equal to the size of the UK. A 2004 Arctic Council study predicted that it would take “several decades” before the ice would melt enough to allow summer crossings through Arctic passages such as the northern sea route across the top of Russia. By 2010, four ships had taken this route and fifty had made the passage in 2012.

In 2007, another study by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), projected that it would take until the end of the twenty-first century before the arctic summer would almost disappear. Today, computer models suggest this could happen within 30 or 40 years.⁸ The last public estimate of the U.S. Geological Survey showed that the Arctic could have as much as 30 percent of the world's undiscovered natural gas, and 13 percent of its undiscovered oil.⁹ Drilling, which many oil companies are either actively engaging in or getting ready to, will of course aggravate warming.

But if we opt to continue with our current practices there are dire consequences—as sea ice melts, there is less bright ice to reflect solar energy back to space, so more energy is absorbed by the dark ocean. As the ocean absorbs more energy, the ocean warms further, causes more ice to melt, which in turn, reduces the bright ice, results in higher absorption by the ocean, more warming, and an iterative cycle continues.¹⁰

Recent extreme rains may have been intensified by the rising global average temperature, according to a recent study, which examined data from more than 8,000 weather stations around the planet. The study looked for correlations between atmospheric temperature and extreme rainfall between 1900 and 2009. The study concludes that there is a 7 percent increase in extreme rainfall intensity for every degree increase in global atmospheric temperature. If extreme rainfall events continue to intensify, we can expect to see floods occurring more frequently around the world.¹¹

There are numerous studies documenting the impacts of a warming planet. All concur: CO₂ emissions are increasing at an accelerating rate and in the absence of a unified global response we will for all intents and purposes be looking at a rearranged planet within 50 years.

Recently, addressing the Asia Society, Admiral Samuel J. Locklear III, one of six US four-star admirals—the highest rank now serving in the Navy—warned that climate change poses a preeminent national security threat. Locklear's area of command—the Asia Pacific—includes China and North Korea and encompasses over half the earth's surface and more than half of its population. The Pacific Ocean, which falls under his remit, "is itself the largest physical feature on the planet. If the world's landmasses were placed in the Pacific, there would still be room left over for an additional Africa, Canada, United States, and Mexico."¹²

Significant upheaval related to the warming planet, he told his audience, "is probably the most likely thing that is going to happen ... that will cripple the security environment, probably more likely than the other scenarios we all often talk about."¹³

"You have the real potential here in the not-too-distant future of nations displaced by rising sea level. Certainly weather patterns are more severe than they have been in the past. We are on super typhoon 27 or 28 this year in the Western Pacific. The average is about 17. The ice is melting and the sea is getting higher. Over 80 percent of the world's population lives within 200 miles of the coast. The island of Tarawa in Kiribati, is contemplating moving its entire population to another country because [it] is not going to exist anymore."¹⁴

"We have interjected into our multilateral dialogue," he continued, "even with China and India—the imperative to get the military capabilities aligned [for] when the effects of climate change start to impact these massive populations, if it goes bad, you could have hundreds of thousands or millions of people displaced and then security will start to crumble pretty quickly."¹⁵

This much we are sure of: average global temperature increased about 1°C (1.8°F); sea levels have increased 6 inches; the planet is at its warmest in 4000 years and in the coming decades is likely to surpass levels not seen on the planet since before the last ice age.¹⁶

The question is: *at how many parts per million (ppm) will we cross the threshold where even if all emissions were to instantaneously stop, there is sufficient CO₂ trapped in the atmosphere to make continuing global warming irreversible?* Rigorous scientific inquiry tagged the best estimate at 350 ppm.

We are well past that marker.

Neuroscience is blazing startling new trails. Among one of its findings: human behavior is the product of an endless stream of perceptions, feelings and thoughts, at both the conscious and subconscious level and that as a result we are not aware of the cause of much of our own behavior.¹⁷ Comforting!

We live, it appears, on the edge of cliffs, or as Maureen Dowd in the *New York Times* so aptly described it: in an age of “cliffinities.” –

So: read, enjoy, and learn.

Notes

¹ “The Arab Spring and Climate Change,” Center for American Progress, February 2013. (<http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/security/report/2013/02/28/54579/the-arab-spring-and-climate-change/>).

² The Stern Review was commissioned by HM Treasury and published in October 2006 as “The Economics of Climate Change.” Sir Nicholas Stern is former Chief Economist and Senior Vice President of the World Bank and adviser to the British government on climate.

³ Heather Stewart and Larry Elliot, “Nicholas Stern: ‘I got it wrong on climate change – it’s far, far worse’”, *The Guardian*, January 27, 2013.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Edmond A. Mathez, *Climate Change: The Science of Global Warming and our Energy Future* (Columbia University Press, 2009).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Pilita Clark, “Frozen Frontiers”, *Financial Times*, February 7, 2013.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Edmond A. Mathez, *Climate Change: The Science of Global Warming and our Energy Future* (Columbia University Press, 2009).

¹¹ Seth Westra, *Science Daily*, February 1, 2013 (study will be published by *Journal of Climate*).

¹² Bryan Bender, “Chief of US Pacific Forces Calls Climate Biggest Worry”, *Boston Globe*, March 9, 2013.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/08/science/earth/global-temperatures-highest-in-4000-years-study-says.html>

¹⁷ Leonard Mlodinow, *Subliminal: How Your Unconscious Mind Rules Your Behavior* (Pantheon Books, New York 2012).