

PROJECT CENSORED'S TOP 25 NEWS STORIES

Continuing a tradition going back to 1976, the Project Censored team has selected and judged the most important American and international news stories of 2013–2014 that should have been given more attention by the US corporate media.

Compiled by
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1. Ocean Acidification Increasing at Unprecedented Rate

It's well known that burning fossil fuels in the form of coal, oil and natural gas releases carbon dioxide (CO₂) into the air. Less understood is that a quarter of this carbon dioxide—about 20 trillion pounds every year—is absorbed by oceans. Craig Welch, writing for the *Seattle Times*, and others reported that this carbon dioxide is changing the ocean's chemistry faster than at any time in our history, in ways that have potentially devastating consequences for both ocean life and for humans who depend on the world's fisheries as vital sources of protein and livelihood.

When CO₂ mixes with seawater, it lowers the pH levels of the water, making it more acidic and sour. Known as ocean acidification, this phenomenon in turn erodes some animals' shells and skeletons and robs the water of ingredients that those animals require for healthy development. According to findings from the 2013 Arctic Ocean Acidification Assessment, the average acidity of surface ocean waters worldwide is more than 30 per cent greater than at the start of the Industrial Revolution. However, the impacts of ocean acidification are not limited to the Arctic and Antarctic oceans.

As Eli Kintisch reported for *Science* magazine, researchers have documented impacts to tiny marine snails in the Pacific Ocean along the West Coast of North America. Normally, pteropods have smooth shells. As Kintisch described, a study led by Dr Nina Bednaršek of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration found that pteropods from 13 coastal sites between Washington state and southern California had pitted shells. In an article published in the *Proceedings of the Royal Society B*, Bednaršek and her colleagues reported that more than half of the shells they collected showed signs of dissolving, which made the shells look like "cauliflower" or "sandpaper". These findings are consistent with previous laboratory studies which showed that, as seawater becomes more acidic, the change disrupts the shell formation process in young pteropods and dissolves already formed shells in mature ones. Previous studies, Kintisch reported, document that shell damage makes it harder for pteropods and other invertebrates to "fight infection, maintain metabolic chemistry, defend themselves against predators, and control buoyancy".

Scientists initially believed that fish would not be directly affected by ocean acidification, but recent research indicates otherwise. From clownfish off the coast of Papua New Guinea to walleye pollock, scientists have found that exposure to high levels of carbon dioxide scramble fish's sense of smell, hearing and sight.

Though fish are excellent at altering their blood chemistry to accommodate changing seas, elevated CO₂ levels disrupt the brain signalling of many fish. Baby clownfish exposed to high levels of CO₂ were five times more likely to die when placed back into the wild.

2. Top 10 US Aid Recipients All Practise Torture

The top 10 nations slated to receive US foreign assistance in fiscal year 2014 all practise torture and are responsible for major human rights abuses. Daniel Wickham based this conclusion on a combination of projected foreign assistance figures from a January 2013 report by the Congressional Research Service and findings on torture reported independently by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and other major human rights organisations.

The Congressional Research Service report, prepared for the members and committees of Congress, indicated the projected fiscal year 2014 budgets for US foreign assistance by country. According to this report, the top 10 countries and their expected assistance are:

1. Israel	\$3,100,000,000
2. Afghanistan	\$2,200,000,000
3. Egypt	\$1,600,000,000
4. Pakistan	\$1,200,000,000
5. Nigeria	\$ 693,000,000
6. Jordan	\$ 671,000,000
7. Iraq	\$ 573,000,000
8. Kenya	\$ 564,000,000
9. Tanzania	\$ 553,000,000
10. Uganda	\$ 456,000,000

Wickham reported that each of the listed countries is accused of torturing people in the last year, and at least half are reported to be doing so on a massive scale. For example, Israel, the top recipient of US financial assistance, has been accused of committing major human rights abuses over the last year, including the torture of Palestinian children. A recent report by the Public Committee Against Torture in Israel described how detained children "suspected of minor crimes" have been sexually assaulted by Israeli security forces and kept in outdoor cages during the winter.



"To expedite a cure for Ebola, we have now deployed hundreds of the nation's top microbiologists, who have been specifically seconded from our germ warfare programme."

It found that "74 per cent [of Palestinian child detainees] experience physical violence during arrest, transfer or interrogation".

A United Nations report indicated that torture is "widespread" in Afghanistan, while Amnesty International documented torture as a "common" practice in Iraq and an "abysmal" human rights situation in Egypt. Human Rights Watch reported that torture is practised with "near-total impunity" in Jordan.

3. WikiLeaks Revelations on Trans-Pacific Partnership Ignored by Corporate Media

On 13 November 2013, WikiLeaks published a section of a trade agreement called the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) Treaty. On the surface, the treaty is meant to facilitate trade among Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, the United States and Vietnam. However, there are a number of red flags surrounding the agreement.

Eight hundred million people, and one-third of all world trade, stand to be affected by the treaty—and yet only three people from each member nation have access to the entire document. Meanwhile, "around 700 cleared advisers", representing big oil, pharmaceutical and entertainment companies, are involved in the writing and negotiations of the treaty.

The influence of these companies is clear, as large sections of the proposal involve corporate law and intellectual property rights rather than free trade. Corporations could gain the ability to sue governments not only for loss but for prospective loss. At the same time, patents and copyrights would see more protection. This means longer patents, leading to less access to generic drugs, and a lockdown on Internet content.

The *Washington Post* was alone among the major establishment press in covering the WikiLeaks revelations about the TPP.

Timothy B. Lee reported that the intellectual property section of the treaty is a "wish list" for Hollywood and the pharmaceutical industry and speculated whether the leak might "derail Obama's trade agenda". However, the *Post* relegated even this relatively superficial and US-focused perspective to its online blog. Other major papers, including the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*, passed on this story of far-reaching global import.

4. Corporate Internet Providers Threaten Net Neutrality

In September 2013, the federal appeals court of Washington, DC, began a crucial case brought by Verizon Communications Inc., challenging the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC's) authority to regulate Internet service providers. Under the FCC's current Open Internet Order,

service providers such as Verizon cannot charge varying prices or give priority to users who access certain websites or may be able to pay more for faster speeds compared to competitors. Verizon claims that the FCC violates its First Amendment right and that it should have the ability to manage and promote the content that it sees fit.

The FCC has continually ruled that controlling communications is not in the best interest of the public. If the court decides in favour of Verizon and revokes the Open Internet Order, the FCC will have no way to regulate unbiased data access, changing the future for everyday Internet users in the 21st century.

5. Bankers Back on Wall Street Despite Major Crimes

A story spanning a decade has come to an unfortunate yet unsurprising end. Three former General Electric bankers—Dominick Carollo, Steven Goldberg and Peter Grimm—had been convicted in 2012 for rigging auctions of municipal bonds, essentially stealing from projects intended to build public schools, hospitals, libraries and nursing homes in virtually every US state. However, in November 2013, those convictions were reversed on a technicality. Because it took federal prosecutors so long to build the massive case, the statute of limitations ran out. The three men were released from prison the next day—just in time, as a defence attorney noted, to be home for Thanksgiving dinner.

These men were part of a decade-long scheme that bilked cities and towns of funds for public-works projects by paying kickbacks to brokers and manipulating bids. Between August 1999 and November 2006, Carollo, Goldberg and Grimm participated in countless rigged bids via telephone. They used a secret language and code words to keep their underground business low-key. Prosecutors accumulated over 570,000 recorded phone conversations that directly linked the men to fraudulent activity. Evidence at trial established that they cost municipalities around the country millions of dollars.

This type of white-collar immorality is a major issue because cash-strapped municipalities could have used the money to provide essential services. Matt Taibbi of *Rolling Stone* [21 June 2012] called this fraud "the equivalent of robbing...a church fund to pay for lap dances". Taibbi, however, is among a few reporters—including Paul Burton and Jonathan Hemmerdinger of the *Bond Buyer*—to consistently inform the public on these crimes and to point out the perhaps insurmountable obstacles faced by the US Department of Justice in getting convictions.

6. The Deep State

It is no secret that concerned citizens are condemning the US government's lack of transparency, accountability and honest constituent representation. Reporting for Moyers & Company, Mike Lofgren, who was a congressional staff member for 28 years, specialising in national security, addressed the issue of the "Deep State" that undemocratically orchestrates unchecked private agendas while corporate media distract the public's attention by focusing on traditional Washington partisan politics. Lofgren contended that, although the Deep State is "neither omniscient nor invincible", it is a "relentlessly well entrenched", "hybrid association of elements of government and parts of top-level finance and industry that is effectively able to govern the United States without reference to the consent of the governed".

Exploiting the world's resources and governments with criminal impunity, a wealthy elite—sporting an estimated US\$32 trillion in tax-exempt offshore havens—is the deep dark secret of plutocratic imperialism, operating behind more visible, privately controlled, government representatives.

Rep. Spencer Bachus, the House Financial Services Committee chairman in 2010, openly flouted constitutional rights when he stated: "[M]y view is that Washington and the regulators are there to serve the banks."

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7. FBI Dismisses Murder Plot against Occupy Leaders as NSA and Big Business Crack Down on Dissent

In October 2011, when the Occupy movement arrived in Houston, Texas, protesters were subject to local and federal surveillance, infiltration by police provocateurs and police assault. As Dave Lindorff reported for WhoWhatWhy, a document obtained in December 2012 from the Houston FBI office shows that the agency was aware of a plot to assassinate Occupy movement leaders—and did nothing about it.

The document, obtained as part of a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request filed by the Washington DC-based Partnership for Civil Justice Fund, reads in part: "An identified [DELETED] as of October planned to engage in sniper attacks against protestors [sic] in Houston, Texas if deemed necessary. An identified [DELETED] had received intelligence that indicated the protesters in New York and Seattle planned similar protests in Houston, Dallas, San Antonio and Austin, Texas. [DELETED] planned to gather intelligence against the leaders of the protest groups and obtain photographs, then formulate a plan to kill the leadership via suppressed sniper rifles."

As of June 2013, Lindorff reported, the FBI knew the identity of the person(s) who planned the sniper attacks but had not released any names. Occupy Houston activists have speculated that the wording "if deemed necessary" might indicate that the unidentified plotter was an organisation such as the police or a private security group.

Documents from the FBI and the Department of Homeland Security identify Occupy as a "terrorist" activity. The FBI has a record of orchestrating attacks on citizen organisations deemed to be threats. For example, the Church Committee hearings of the 1970s revealed that the FBI orchestrated local police attacks (in Chicago, San Francisco and New York) on leaders of the Black Panther Party.

Alex Kane of AlterNet wrote that a report by Beau Hodai provided "an eye-opening look into how US counter-terrorism agencies monitored the Occupy movement in 2011 and 2012". Government documents, obtained by the Center for Media and Democracy and DBA Press from the National Security Agency and other government offices, revealed "a grim mosaic of 'counter-terrorism' agency operations" and negative attitudes towards activists and other citizens.

The upshot, Hodai reported, is "the wholesale criminalization of tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of American citizens who have dared to voice opposition to what is increasingly viewed as the undue influence of private corporate/financial interests in the functions of public government".

8. Corporate News Ignores Connections Between Extreme Weather and Global Warming

A study by Fairness & Accuracy In Reporting (FAIR) found that extreme weather events in 2013 resulted in 450 news segments, of which only 16 mentioned climate change.

As for specific evening news shows, CBS *Evening News* used terms like "global warming" and "greenhouse gases" in only two of 114 extreme weather reports. ABC *World News* mentioned "climate change" in eight reports out of 200, and NBC *Nightly News* mentioned it in six reports out of one hundred and thirty-six. There was also a CBS report on the unsupported notion that there had been a "pause" in global warming.

There continues to be serious scientific debate on the extent to which current weather events and climate change should be linked. Nonetheless, the majority of the American public still makes the connection between climate and weather, despite the media's failure to report on it.

9. US Media Hypocrisy in Covering Ukraine Crisis

Russia's occupation of Crimea has caused US corporate media and government officials to call for a stern US response. Secretary of State John Kerry declaimed the Russian intervention as "a 19th-century act in the 21st century". What Russia's US critics seem to forget, Robert Parry reported, is the United States' own history of overthrowing democratic governments, including the illegal invasion of Iraq, which Kerry supported.

US corporate media has also failed to acknowledge that Putin was suggesting the occupation of Kiev after a coup led at least partly by neo-Nazis—conditions arguably less criminal than the US invasion of Iraq, which the US legitimised with false claims.

"If Putin is violating international law by sending Russian troops into the Crimea after a violent coup spearheaded by neo-Nazi militias ousted Ukraine's democratically elected president," wrote Parry, "then why hasn't the US government turned over George W. Bush, Dick Cheney and indeed John Kerry to the International Criminal Court for their far more criminal invasion of Iraq?" (In a similar vein, Noam Chomsky has written about the US occupation of Guantánamo in Cuba as another instance of the contradiction between the US position towards Russia and its

There continues to be serious scientific debate on the extent to which current weather events and climate change should be linked.

own lack of respect for national sovereignty.)

Further, Ukraine's democratically elected president, Viktor Yanukovich, fled Kiev for his life after the coup and sought Russia's help quelling the neo-Nazi groups in Ukraine, citing their oppression of the country's native Russian population. It was only after this that Putin requested the Russian parliament's permission to deploy Russian troops to stop the expansion of neo-Nazi control to areas that have deep historical ties to Russia.

Nevertheless, while downplaying these details, US corporate media accuse Russia of violating international law. "Thus, the overriding hypocrisy of the *Washington Post*, Secretary Kerry and indeed nearly all of Official Washington is their insistence that the United States actually promotes the principle of democracy or, for that matter, the rule of international law," wrote Parry. "Those are at best situational ethics when it comes to advancing US interests around the world." In a subsequent report, Parry wrote that, despite evidence to the contrary, US policy-makers and corporate media have intentionally neglected to report that neo-Nazi militias played a central role in the 22 February 2014 overthrow of President Viktor Yanukovich. Parry reported: "The US media's take on the Ukraine crisis is that a 'democratic revolution' ousted President Viktor Yanukovich, followed

by a 'legitimate' change of government. So, to mention the key role played by neo-Nazi militias in the putsch or to note that Yanukovych was democratically elected—and then illegally deposed—gets you dismissed as a 'Russian propagandist'."

A resurgence of Cold War rhetoric may make better sense against the backdrop of geopolitical oil interests, as analysed by Nafeez Ahmed. As he reported, Ukraine finds itself between the two superpowers and their ongoing struggle for influence in the Eurasian oil market. Russia's Gazprom Company already controls roughly one-fifth of the world's oil supply. In 2013, Ukraine signed a \$10 billion shale gas deal with US-based Chevron in the hope of ending its dependency on Russian gas by 2020. Professor R. Craig Nation, director of Russian and Eurasian Studies at the US Army War College, stated in a NATO publication: "Ukraine is increasingly perceived to be critically situated in the emerging battle to dominate energy transport corridors linking the oil and natural gas reserves of the Caspian basin to European markets..."

10. WHO Suppresses Report on Iraqi Cancers and Birth Defects

In contradiction with its own mandate, the World Health Organization (WHO) continues to suppress evidence uncovered in Iraq that US military use of depleted uranium (DU) and other weapons have not only killed many civilians but also are the cause of an epidemic of birth defects and other public health issues. By refusing to release the report publicly, the WHO effectively protects the US military and its government from accountability for the resulting health catastrophe.

A WHO and Iraq Ministry of Health report on cancers and birth defects was set to be released in November 2012, but officials have indefinitely delayed that report's release. To this date [13 September 2013], Denis Halliday wrote, the WHO report remains "classified". According to the WHO, the report's release has been delayed because its analysis needs to be evaluated by a "team of independent scientists".

Meanwhile, the reality in Iraq, Mozghan Savabiasfahani contended, is that "Iraq is poisoned". For example, citing a peer-reviewed study that she helped conduct, Savabiasfahani wrote: "Thirty-five million Iraqis wake up every morning to a living nightmare of childhood cancers, adult cancers and birth defects. Familial cancers, cluster cancers and multiple

cancers in the same individual have become frequent in Iraq." Why, then, does the WHO refuse to release its study? "One possible answer," she wrote, "was suggested on May 26 by the *Guardian*." In that article, John Pilger reported the recent comments of Hans von Sponeck, the former Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations (see <http://tinyurl.com/k82648a>).

11. Wealthy Donors and Corporations Set Think-Tanks' Agendas

Think-tanks provide information and analysis to policy-makers and the public, making them increasingly influential institutions in our political process. However, many think-tanks—including the Brookings Institution, Heritage Foundation, American Enterprise Institute, Cato Institute and the RAND Corporation, among others—receive significant financial backing from extremely wealthy corporations and/or individuals. Because the law does not require public disclosure of donors' identities, these relationships raise the issue of whether think-tanks' analyses and recommendations are "tainted by donor agendas", according to a July 2013 report by Fairness & Accuracy In Reporting (FAIR).

In its study of the nation's top 25 think-tanks, FAIR finds that all have received money from corporations, foundations, government or major individual donors. In many cases, these donors not only get a tax deduction for their contributions, but they also can influence the think-tank's formulation of policy.

FAIR found that almost two-thirds of the top 25 think-tanks have taken money from oil

companies, with 13 funded by ExxonMobil, nine by Chevron and four by Shell. Representatives of Big Energy also serve as members of many think-tanks' boards. Similarly, half of the top 25 think-tanks receive money from weapons manufacturers.

12. Pentagon Awash in Money Despite Audit Problems

US Congress is expanding the Pentagon's 2014 budget by \$32 billion. The Pentagon currently receives over \$600 billion when its current budget is combined with supplemental war funding. One out of every five US tax dollars is spent on defence, cumulatively more than the total of the next 10 countries' defence budgets combined. Where does the money go? "The exact answer is a mystery," wrote Dave Gilson for *Mother Jones*. "That's because the Pentagon's books are a complete mess."

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As the Government Accountability Office dryly noted, the Pentagon has "serious financial management problems" that render its financial statements "inauditable".

Despite a 1997 requirement that federal agencies submit to annual audits, the Pentagon, Gilson reported, claims it will not "achieve audit readiness" until 2017.

Lack of budgetary accountability has led to risky investments by the Pentagon, Gilson noted, including the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, for example. As Gilson summarised, the F-35 program is "years behind schedule, hugely over budget, and plagued with problems that have earned them a reputation as the biggest defense boondoggle in history".

13. Lawsuit Challenges Nuclear Power Industry Immunity from Liability in Nuclear Accidents

A lawsuit filed by lawyers on behalf of 1,415 plaintiffs, including 38 residents of Fukushima and 357 persons from outside Japan, holds not only the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) but also Toshiba, Hitachi and General Electric (GE) responsible for the 2011 meltdown of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

Historically, manufacturers and operators of nuclear power plants have been granted immunity from liability for accidents because no insurance company anywhere in the world would agree to insure the power plants when the industry first developed. As NSNBC International reported, the Fukushima case is a "landmark challenge" to nuclear power plant manufacturers' immunity from liability in nuclear accidents.

In the 1970s, Toshiba, Hitachi and GE manufactured the tanks developed to hold radioactive fluids.

Among the evidence in support of the plaintiffs' case is a report by Japan's Fisheries Research Agency that found radiation levels in sea life south of the plant to be 124 times more than the threshold considered safe for human consumption. The Japanese government and TEPCO have sought to keep the situation under wraps, and the public is largely unaware of the nuclear power industry's irresponsible actions. Inaccurate reports of the radiation damage from TEPCO, along with inadequate manpower to deal with the crisis, have resulted in poor attempts to reverse the radiation damage that resulted from the meltdown of TEPCO's Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant following the March 2011 tsunami.

A senior adviser for the Fukushima clean-up, Lady (Barbara) Judge has said that foreign assistance in dealing with the nuclear clean-up is needed. However,

TEPCO has withheld accurate radiation readings of the leaks, making foreign assistance impossible. The resulting poor clean-up efforts have further damaged ecosystems around Fukushima, without providing proper supportive action to repair them.

GE is not being held accountable for its role in the Fukushima disaster, Chris Carrington reported, because of its ties to the Obama administration. In 2009, General Electric CEO Jeffrey Immelt was appointed by President Barack Obama to lead the Economic Recovery Advisory Board. Five of the six nuclear reactors used at Fukushima were GE Mark I Boiling Water Reactor vessels; three of these were not only supplied but also built by General Electric. Since 1972, nuclear reactors of the type have been considered safety risks due to their particular vulnerability to explosion and rupture from hydrogen build-up.

14. Accumulating Evidence of Ongoing Wireless Technology Health Hazards

Wireless phones emit radiofrequency electromagnetic fields (RF-EMFs) when in use. In May 2011, after the consideration of laboratory

findings, studies of long-term use of wireless phones and data on the incidence of brain tumours, the World Health Organization (WHO) determined RF-EMF to be a "possible" human carcinogen. Other studies have associated long-term mobile and cordless phone use with glioma and acoustic neuroma.

In October 2013, Powerwatch, a UK-based watchdog focused on the health risks posed by

electromagnetic fields, reported that two new research articles provide further evidence of mobile phone use as a cause of increased brain tumours.

The first paper showed that RF-EMF exposure from mobile and cordless phones should be regarded as a class 1 human carcinogen, as defined by the WHO's International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC). The studies' authors concluded that current exposure guidelines are in urgent need of revision. (See Hardell, L. and Carlberg, M., *Rev. Env. Health* 2013 Nov; 28[3]:97-106.)

The second study aimed to assess "the relationship between especially long-term (>10 years) use of wireless phones and the development of malignant brain tumours".

This study "confirmed previous results of an association between mobile and cordless phone use and malignant brain tumours" and supported "the hypothesis that RF-EMFs play a role both in the initiation and promotion stages of carcinogenesis"—in other words, the process by which normal cells are

...the media blackout is likely intended to keep the public unaware of not only the health dangers associated with smart meters but also potentially hidden agendas...

transformed into cancer cells. (See Hardell, L. *et al.*, *Int. J. Oncol.* 2013 Sep 24; 43(6):1833-1845.)

Mobile phones are not the only wireless technology that poses health threats. As James F. Tracy reported, the US has seen a virtual media blackout on the radiation dangers of smart meters. In January 2014, Tracy reported that the IARC has stated that radiofrequency electromagnetic fields are "possibly carcinogenic to humans based on an increased risk for glioma, a malignant type of brain cancer, associated with wireless cellphone use".

Smart meters are a central element in the creation of a "smart grid" that President Obama has made a priority. In his article, Tracy wrote that the media blackout is likely intended to keep the public unaware of not only the health dangers associated with smart meters but also potentially hidden agendas, including the meters' potential for "social control...via energy rationing and surveillance". A "more immediate" motivation, he wrote, is "simply profit and continued media monopoly control of public opinion and discourse".

Tracy reported on a content analysis of US newspapers between 31 May 2011, the date when WHO declared RF a class 2B carcinogen, and June 2014. Of the 839 articles published in that time, less than 10 per cent (82 articles) mention both "smart meters" and "carcinogen" or "carcinogenic" in the same report.

Meanwhile, corporate news coverage in the US reassured the public that the Federal Communications Commission had found smart meters to be within its safety standards, that they impose no danger to one's health and that they are environmentally friendly.

15. Reporting Miscarriages, Criminalising Pregnant Women's Bodies

A proposed bill before the Kansas state legislature would require women to report miscarriages at any stage in pregnancy. This has been described as the first step along the path to criminalising pregnant women's bodies. Under an amendment attached to House Bill 2613, doctors would be required to report all of their patients' miscarriages to the state health department, Tara Culp-Ressler reported for ThinkProgress.

The initial purpose of HB 2613 was to provide an alternative to the state's current stillbirth certificate. Some parents believe the existing law overemphasises their child's death in a way that is emotionally painful.

Senator Mary Pilcher-Cook, who is among the state's most active and enthusiastic abortion opponents, added the miscarriage-reporting requirement. The bill's original author, Kansas Representative John

Doll, subsequently withdrew his support for the legislation.

No other state has enacted a mandatory miscarriage-reporting law, Culp-Ressler reported, although Virginia considered similar legislation in 2009.

16. The Beef Industry's "Feedlot Feedback Loop"

The beef industry increasingly feeds cattle "poultry litter" scraped from chicken coop floors, a practice that, as Brad Jacobson reported for OnEarth, "risks the spread of mad cow disease—yet the FDA [Food and Drug Administration] has done nothing to stop it". After a string of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE, or "mad cow disease") scares in the 1980s and 1990s, many precautions were taken to prevent further outbreaks. BSE affects humans slowly but fatally, and cooking beef thoroughly does not get rid of the prion proteins.

In 1997, the FDA made it illegal to feed dead cows to living cows—the main cause of the disease. In response to those laws, the beef industry teamed up with the poultry industry to exploit a major loophole in the 1997 law. Jacobson describes a "Feedlot Feedback Loop": first, the poultry industry feeds the dead remains of cattle to chickens and other poultry; the mess created by poultry, known as "litter", is then sold to the cattle producer who feed it to cattle that the public eventually consumes as beef.

In early 2003, the FDA proposed to ban the use of poultry litter as cattle feed. Big Agriculture opposed this, and the FDA revised its policy. Instead of a permanent ban, the FDA required chicken-feed manufacturers to agree that they would leave out the riskiest, most infectious bovine tissues.

17. 2016 Will Find Gaza Out of Drinking Water

In Gaza, up to 1.7 million Palestinians currently live without clean drinking water. With no perennial streams and low rainfall, Gaza relies on a single aquifer



Palestinian children fill plastic bottles and water containers with drinking water from a public tap in Jabalia in the northern Gaza Strip. (Source: NPR.org)

for all of its fresh water. The coastal aquifer, Zander Swinburne reported, is contaminated with sewage, chemicals and seawater.

The Palestinian Water Authority recently determined that 95 per cent of the water in Gaza does not meet WHO standards for human consumption. The polluted water causes chronic health problems and contributes to high rates of child mortality. One study estimated that 26 per cent of disease in Gaza results from contaminated water supplies. The crippling Egyptian–Israeli blockade on Gaza has exacerbated the problem.

A recent United Nations report warned that the water situation for Palestinians in Gaza is "critical". According to that report, "[t]he aquifer could become unusable as early as 2016, with the damage irreversible by 2020".

The United Nations estimates that over 80 per cent of Gazans buy their drinking water, with some families paying as much as a third of their household income, according to June Kunugi, a special representative of the UN children's fund UNICEF.

Palestinians purchase more than a quarter of their water from Israel's national water company, Mekorot, Al Jazeera reported. Mekorot sells Gaza 4.2 million cubic metres of water annually.

Contaminated water also affects agriculture in Gaza. For example, high levels of salinity mean that most citrus crops can no longer be grown.

The blockade of Gaza intensifies the water problems. Materials needed for repairs of water and waste facilities cannot be imported. Lack of reliable electricity has forced 85 per cent of agricultural wells out of operation, contributing to the risk of drought for more than 30,000 square acres of crops.

18. National Database of Police Killings Aims for Accountability

Although the Federal Bureau of Investigation tracks how many police officers die in the line of duty, it keeps no such record for how many civilians are killed by police each year. Recognising a significant gap in the public records of civilian deaths at the hands of law enforcement officers, D. Brian Burghart, the editor of the *Reno News & Review* and a journalism instructor at the University of Nevada, decided to create a public database. "In 2014, how could we not know how many people our government kills on our streets every year," he wondered. So he launched Fatal Encounters, a website that, as Bethania Palma Markus reported for Truthout, "tracks and tallies when cops take lives and invites the public to help build the database". Burghart has compiled a list of police agencies across the USA to facilitate public-record requests about fatal incidents.

19. Agribusiness Giants Attempt to Silence and Discredit Scientists Whose Research Reveals Herbicides' Health Threats

Independent journalists including E. Ann Clark, James Corbett, Rachel Aviv and those at *Democracy Now!* documented how agriculture giants Monsanto and Syngenta have attempted to silence the findings and destroy the reputations of scientists whose research shows that the companies' herbicides pose serious threats to health.

In September 2012, Dr Gilles-Éric Séralini published research findings in the peer-reviewed *Journal of Food and Chemical Toxicology* which showed the toxic impact of Monsanto's herbicide and genetically modified (GM) corn—including adverse health effects on rats. However, after publication, the journal made the unprecedented decision to retract the study. Journal editor Dr A. Wallace Hayes admitted that none of the established criteria for

retracting a study applied to the Séralini paper.

However, as Clark and Corbett reported, a new connection between the journal and Monsanto might account for the retraction, as well as another retraction of a similar study from Brazil that demonstrated the toxic effects on mice of an insecticide that forms the basis of Bt GM crops. In May 2013, the journal created a new position, Associate Editor for

Biotechnology, and selected Richard E. Goodman, from the University of Nebraska, to fill it and preside over such retractions. Goodman worked in regulatory sciences for Monsanto from 1997 to 2004.

Monsanto is not alone in trying to silence its critics. After 15 years of research, Tyrone Hayes, Professor of Integrative Biology at the University of California, Berkeley, determined that Syngenta's herbicide atrazine causes sexual abnormalities in frogs and could cause the same problems in humans. The company now known as Syngenta hired Hayes to research atrazine in 1997; but when his findings ran contrary to their interests, they refused to allow him to publish and instead worked to discredit him. He left Syngenta in 2001, but continued to research the harmful effects of atrazine on the endocrine system.

20. Estonia a Global Example of E-Government, Digital Freedom, Privacy and Security

Since Estonia regained independence in 1991, its government has sought to redesign the nation's entire information infrastructure with goals of openness, privacy and security.

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The technology platform that Estonia built to serve its citizens sets an example for the rest of the world. Each citizen has one identification number to use across all systems, from paper passport to bank records to any government office or medical care. This includes giving electronic signatures, filing taxes and voting. Estonians elect their parliament online, and get their tax refunds back in two days.

The liquid movement of data along with privacy and security measures are of primary importance. Citizens have the ability to choose who can see their information. A citizen cannot block the state from seeing their data, but they can see who has accessed their data and file an enquiry to have an official fired if their information is accessed without valid reason.

21. Questioning the Charter School Hype

Charter schools have been heralded as the antidote to "failed" public schools, especially in poor urban communities of African American and Latino/a students. Politicians and celebrities alike now advocate charter schools and preside over their openings. However, as Salon, AlterNet and other independent media outlets have reported, charter schools have come under fire for not fulfilling the roles or achieving the results that their proponents have claimed.

Recent news reports have indicated that, instead of providing positive teaching and preparing children for the future, charter schools are subjecting students to padded cells, public shaming and embarrassment, poor instruction and the negative consequences of financial corruption.

22. Corporate News Media Understate Rape, Sexual Violence

Media analysts observe how journalists refrain from using the word "rape" to describe incidents of sexual assault. Instead, news outlets downplay the humiliation and cruelty entailed in these acts by referring to them as "sex crimes", "inappropriate sexual activity" or "forced sex", even though such acts are legally recognised as "rape".

A report released by Legal Momentum, a New York City-based feminist advocacy law group, titled "Raped or 'Seduced'? How Language Helps Shape Our Response to Sexual Violence", addressed what it terms the "linguistic avoidance" of such concerns.

23. Number of US Prison Inmates Serving Life Sentences Hits New Record

A report released by The Sentencing Project, a Washington, DC-based nonprofit criminal justice advocacy group, revealed that the number of prisoners

serving life sentences in the US state and federal prisons reached a new record of close to 160,000 in 2012. Of these, 49,000 are serving life without the possibility of parole, an increase of 22.2 per cent since 2008. The study's findings place in striking context the figures promoted by the federal government, which indicate a reduction in the overall number of prisoners in federal and state facilities from 1.62 million to 1.57 million between 2009 and 2012.

Dr Ashley Nellis, senior research analyst with The Sentencing Project, argued that the rise in prisoners serving life sentences has to do with political posturing over "tough on crime" measures.

24. Restorative Justice Turns Violent Schools Around

Last year when American Paradigm Schools took over Philadelphia's infamous, failing, John Paul Jones Middle School, they did something that many people would find inconceivable.

Rather than beef up the already heavy security to ensure safety and restore order, American Paradigm stripped it away. During renovations, they removed metal detectors and window bars. The police predicted chaos. But, instead, new numbers seem to show that in a single year the number of serious incidents fell by 90 per cent.

The school was known as "Jones Jail" for its reputation of violence and disorder, and because the building physically resembled a youth correctional facility. Situated in the Kensington section of the city, it drew students from the heart of a desperately poor hub of injection drug-users and street-level prostitution where gun-violence rates are off the charts.

School officials stated it wasn't just the humanising physical makeover of the facility that helped. They also credit the Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP), a noncoercive, nonviolent conflict-resolution regimen originally used in prison settings and later adapted to violent schools. AVP, when tailored to school settings, emphasises student empowerment, relationship building and anger management over institutional control and surveillance.

25. "Chaptered Out": US Military Seeks to Balance Budget on Backs of Disabled Veterans

The US military has been engaged in a policy of forcing wounded and disabled veterans out of service to avoid paying benefits and to make room for new able-bodied recruits.

Identifying injured combat soldiers as delinquent and negligent has led to a practice called "chaptering out", which results in those soldiers being forced to leave the military without an honourable discharge. Because of this, thousands of soldiers have been chaptered out, losing federally sponsored benefits including health care, unemployment and educational programs. ∞