



THE  
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BREAKFAST CLUB, INC.

# First Friday News & Views

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## THINGS I LEARNED IN PERU

by Jonathan Wilson

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### CALENDAR

▼ The next FFBC meeting is 7:00 A.M., Friday, November 6, 2009 at Hoyt Sherman Place.

R.S.V.P. by Tuesday November 3 to [JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com](mailto:JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com) or 288-2500 by phone.

Lose you balance in a Peruvian terraced farm field and you could fall a LONG way down.

Tether one of two donkeys and you have tethered them both. The one without the tether won't leave the other one. There's a metaphor there that may deserve an article of its own.

Tethered animals stretch the tether away from a passing train.

Paper currency is without intrinsic value and that's no more evident than in the Peruvians' reluctance to accept US dollars having any imperfections. The slightest tear renders them utterly useless and without value in Peru. In good condition, however, you can spend them as readily as Peruvian currency, and the locals can do the currency conversion in their heads -- and inevitably to their advantage in either direction.

If you have a motor vehicle and seating space, they should be shared with complete strangers who don't.

Pedestrians having the right-of-way is not a universally recognized principle. In Peru, the one with the horn has the right-of-way.

Not passing a stopped school bus is not a universal concept. Cell phones are universal, and so is McDonald's.

Among those with horns in Peru, driving is an unsophisticated, perpetual game of chicken and near misses.

In an environment of mixed cultures/nationalities/languages, and complete strangers, waiting respectfully in line is a lost, if ever held, art. We would get in a line and end up moving in reverse. It was, obviously, frustrating -- not a big deal in the grand scheme of things, perhaps, except perhaps as a metaphor for that bigger picture.

Peru's altitude gives you a sneak preview of what it will be like to be old or to suffer from emphysema. In short, the slightest exertion is breathtaking. So is the scenery.

Except roaming llamas, everything in Peru holds pretty still. Good photos become a function of focus and lighting. Master those two in Peru and you've got it made. Next stop, National Geographic.

Resist the temptation to take a photograph of anyone carrying a loaded gun. This was not learned in the breach; it came to me intuitively.

There are three uncompromising rules in foreign travel: never be separated from your passport, your cash, or your camera. My partner Todd would add to that list, toilet paper and hand sanitizer.

A dish with chicken in it, however prepared, is safer to satisfy your palate than almost any other.

The fantasy of selecting at random some impoverished Peruvian young person and paying the tab for him/her to experience the opulence of a first class train ride through the spectacular Peruvian countryside will generate an even bet whether that would inspire ambition to

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achieve and acquire, or revolutionary impatience to take and acquire.

And for men only: Never try standing up to pee into a toilet on a moving train while keeping the seat up and maintaining your balance and your aim. Take my word for it; it can be done. It's difficult at best, and you could throw out your back and ruin the rest of an otherwise wonderful trip. My advice is simple: sit on it. That will be enough of a challenge on a moving train.

Oh, and by the way, a roasted Guinea Pig does taste a lot like chicken.

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*Milestones are important; try setting some for yourself.*



## October Speakers

David Adelman & Leisha Barcus

Our speakers on October 2 were Leisha Barcus and David Adelman, two of the five candidates for election (on November 3) to the Des Moines City Council seat being vacated by Michael Kiernan. Kiernan has been named chairman of the Iowa Democratic Party. The other three candidates for the at-large seat—Cyndi Chen, Louis “Skip” Moore, and David Rosenfeld—had not asked to speak to us.

Adelman spoke first, emphasizing his determination and commitment to Des Moines, his political work for the Kerry presidential campaign and as a two-term member of the Democratic State Central Committee, and his professional experience in municipal law and working with the Iowa Finance Authority. He wrote the 501(c)3 and 501(c)4 applications for One Iowa, and is on several boards, including the Des Moines Playhouse. Adelman said he would strengthen neighborhoods—he’s knocked on upwards of 5,000 doors in this campaign—support our businesses, and provide a refreshing voice on the Council that will speak as one of the new generation of

leaders in Des Moines.

Barcus then re-introduced herself to us (she had been an FFBC guest speaker while she was executive director of Hoyt Sherman Place in 2001-2005), and cited her success in spearheading the six-month, \$5.2 million restoration of the auditorium and art gallery on time and on budget. She said her current experience as a Des Moines Plan and Zoning commissioner would allow her to “hit the ground running” if elected. Her ten years of professional economic development experience—successfully “selling” Des Moines to nationwide business investors—includes guidance of numerous agencies and projects, both for-profit and nonprofit: Downtown Development for the Greater Des Moines Partnership, the Capital City Visions Project, Bravo Greater Des Moines, Vision Iowa, Recycle Iowa, Center on Sustainable Communities, Embrace Iowa: 2008 Disaster Fund, and her own company, Priority Projects, a management firm that assists organizations with strategic and collaborative initiatives and marketing communications.

Both candidates agreed that a \$5.5 million budget shortfall is the first big issue they'll have to tackle if elected. Barcus said she'd “beef up” economic development and streamline government operations to close that gap. Adelman said the answer is to keep current businesses from leaving the city and to encourage more to locate in downtown Des Moines to fill an anticipated 1.5 million square feet of vacant real estate in coming years.

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David Adelman graduated from the Des Moines public schools and from Miami University in Ohio, and received his law degree from Drake University Law School in May 2006 with a Legislative Practice certificate. He is an attorney with the Brick Gentry Law Firm. He is co-chair of the Des Moines Jewish Federation Emerging Leader Institute, a member of the 2008 Business Record’s “Forty under 40,” and an alumnus of the Greater Des Moines Leadership Institute and the Polk County Citizens Academy. In his free time, he teaches a financial literacy class through Junior Achievement at his alma mater, Theodore Roosevelt High School.

Leisha Barcus was born and raised in Davenport, where she graduated from Assumption High School in 1980. In 1984, she earned a B.A. in Psychology from Creighton University in Omaha. She has been a member of the Des Moines community since 1986. She is married to Gregg Barcus, and their two daughters attend Des Moines public schools. Barcus is a graduate of the Greater Des Moines Transformational Leadership Institute, Class of 2002, and of the Greater Des Moines Leadership Institute, Class of 2000. This June she was recognized by the Greater Des Moines Leadership Institute with the 2009 Distinguished Civic Leadership Award.

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*If you think you can or you think you can't,  
you're probably right.*

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# Capitalism: A Love Story

Directed by Michael Moore

Review by Gary Kaufman

One of the best illustrations of a pure capitalist in literature is Scrooge in Dicken's **A Christmas Carol**. Scrooge underpays his employee to the point where the employee can't adequately feed his family; he provides no health care for his worker; and he decries governmental interference when he is required by law to give his employee a day off for Christmas. He considers it highway robbery! He didn't give to charities; he didn't adequately heat his employee's work area; and he refused to spend money to fix outdated things like his company's sign. For all this, under capitalism, he is rewarded with lots and lots of money. Pure capitalism rewards you generously for depriving others. It has no heart; it has no soul. Yet it has been propagandized to Americans as the "greatest system in the world."

Michael Moore makes this point in this his latest movie by opening with footage from a 1950s **Encyclopedia Britannica** film on the fall of the Roman Empire. It showed that the entire social system tenuously survived with an incredible income discrepancy between the wealthy and the rest of the population; it depended on slave labor. Interspersed in this footage were shots of modern America and Moore narratively wondering how future civilizations will view us. He then shows people all across America losing their homes at the rate of one foreclosure every 7 ½ SECONDS! People are shown being thrown out of their homes; some are evicted from family farms or from homes where they have lived their entire lives. Their homes are being seized, and some houses are boarded up, thus aggravating urban decay. Meanwhile, some people are making lots of money out of the situation. Moore shows realtor in Florida who calls himself a Condo Vulture; he looks for condominium foreclosures for his clients who take advantage of the misfortune of others, get the places for 25 cents on the dollar, fix them up a bit, and take a quick turnaround profit.

Moore points out that previously in America the rich made lots of money, but they were taxed at a graduated rate that maxed at 90% of their incomes over a certain amount. Yet the wealthy were still able to live like royalty and the government used the tax proceeds to build bridges, schools, hospitals, and other public improvements. It worked well -- for everyone. But just as President Carter was cautioning the American public of our growing malaise, a guy rode into town to save us -- Ronald Reagan. He persuaded Congress to give tax breaks to the very rich to the point that they could actually get an effective tax rate LOWER than some middle-income families. The results have not been good for everyone.

On top of this, those in charge of banking regulation are all people who were formerly top brass at Goldman Sachs, an enormous brokerage firm on Wall Street. Moore names

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*Learn from your mistakes. Better yet, learn from the mistakes of others.*

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names. It should be no wonder that when their devised schemes came crashing down, Goldman Sachs survived. Congress gave the folks who caused the debacle \$700 billion but can't seem to find enough money for health care reform or for the good of the little people who are suffering. The wheelers and dealers in Congress have been given sweetheart loans from the "regulated" banks. An economic coup d'état is the way Moore characterizes it.

Moore does show some instances where common people have revolted. In a Chicago factory closed without notice when Bank of America refused to continue an operating line of credit, the workers occupied the plant and locked the doors. Eventually, through publicity and the support of President Obama, Bank of America opted to pay the workers their back wages. It was a small concession in the grand scheme of things, and such small victories are too few.

There's footage of President Roosevelt declaring that after the war there should be a new bill of rights that would include the right to a good paying job, a home, quality and free education, adequate health care, and other benefits. Alas, Roosevelt did not see the end of the war, and the new "bill of rights" died with him. Paradoxically, they were included in constitutions of countries we defeated in the war, like Germany, Italy, and Japan – but not in the US.

Moore, as always, entertains the audience by showing

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## BRIEFS & SHORTS

Be sure to RSVP for the November 6 meeting no later than November 3. E-mail [JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com](mailto:JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com) or call him at 288-2500. Our speakers will be Bill Dessauer and Ronald Gottl, financial and estate planners.



Thanks to Michael Thompson for his introduction of our October speakers, Des Moines City Council at-large candidates David Adelman and Leisha Barcus.



A reminder to both members and non-members to designate FFBC when filling out your United Way pledge card.



PROS party on November 14 at 7:00 at the home of Byron Huff and Jim Anderson. Call 288-9519 for reservations and directions.



Consider making a tax-deductible contribution to the First Friday Breakfast Club Scholarship Fund .



## Capitalism (cont.)

(Continued from page 3)

up at AIG to make a “citizen’s arrest” and to ask for the money back. “Step away from the building,” he shouts. He shows up with a Brinks truck and a bag with a large \$ sign on it, saying he would take the money back to the US Treasury.

Overall, I didn’t think the film was quite up to par for Moore’s films. It lacked focus and could have used a little editing to shorten it. But he does make some powerful points. As he says at the beginning of the film, it should not be watched by those who are weak of heart because it’s so disheartening to see what America has become under the capitalist system.

If you see the film, sit through the credits for some rather disparaging statements made by our Founding Fathers about the banking system. For instance, Thomas Jefferson thought banks were “more of a danger to the United States than a standing army.” Benjamin Franklin and others are also quoted. It seems they had more faith in democracy than in capitalism.

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## Renewed Social Graces

By an FFBC member

Recently my partner and I were invited to a very nice party. Upon arrival we were not introduced to anyone. I have noticed this same phenomenon lately at a variety of functions. Eventually my companion introduced me to "Carson's mom," a nice woman in the company of an equally nice man. We exchanged pleasantries and moved on. People split into smaller groups of folks that already knew each other.

Then, at last, a young autistic lad who had been walking around in a little fireman's outfit stuck out his hand and said, "I'm Adam; who are you?" How refreshing. I'm sure he'd been taught to do this at some special education class. I said to myself, "Thank God for Adam." At least he had the social sense to introduce himself to everyone. At that point, other than those I already knew, I knew at least Adam and "Carson's mom" in a whole room full of people.

What has happened to our social graces that we no longer introduce people or announce guests when they arrive? What's going on? I'm still wondering whether the man with Carson's mom was Carson's dad, or Carson's mom's "friend." And that reminds me, I must remember to ask my partner, "Who's Carson?"

## Corporation-Run Government

Tony E. Hansen

Why are Americans so willing to let large, gluttonous corporations run the country or willing to give those corporations incentives that small businesses do not get? The United States was founded upon principles of individual liberty and representative power. Yet, we implicitly protect the ability of companies to make decisions about our lives without them being accountable for those decisions. We are willing to give incentives to the largest of these in order to “generate” business and, presumably, jobs. Yet, by giving these larger entities advantages over small businesses (e.g. tax breaks, build parking lots, or marketing their names at public arenas), we crowd out competition and help them to monopolize the market away from chances for local businesses to compete and flourish.

We are collectively willing to argue about trivial political issues or the “correct” candidate in Washington. Yet, many of the issues today are embedded in corporations with supra-national interests (which, incidentally, can fund political campaigns far better than the average middle-class American). We get all excited and entice large corporations that are “too large to fail” rather than focusing on local workers’ interests or the small businesses that keep downtowns lively. Campaigns are rife with corporate interests touting the need for low taxes and a favorable business climate while they continue to move jobs to foreign markets and turn downtowns into deserted places.

We seem willing to trade our representation rights for “the invisible hand” of corporate influence. Have we been duped into thinking that we can control these entities through the election of Manchurian candidates? Seemingly, these candidates have their hands in the corporate cookie jar. Recall, if you will, how energy policy and financial deregulation were *written* by the companies being regulated.

We are no longer investing in ourselves but, instead, we have been steadily funding our global competitors by helping them build manufacturing sectors, information technology, transportation systems, and a middle class. As a prime example, the bridge collapse in Minneapolis shows the result of mostly unelected, elite power rings getting rich through decisions that avoid investing in the community. While they move out the resources, move out the jobs, evade their share of taxes, or build foreign factories, the infrastructure and middle class in the United States collapse. They characterize the “problem” as government mismanagement, but the real problem is governments giving away resources through tax abatement or otherwise that could otherwise be spent for the common good here at home. We have let corporations shape the debate about health care, financial derivatives, energy policy, or labor in terms that best fit their immediate interests at the expense of the public good.

The time is now to reclaim our government from interests that do not invest in our country or our society. We need to break up the largest corporations because we cannot let a potential corporate giant failure mean catastrophic depression for the rest of us.

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*Those who remain passive in the presence of injustice are complicit in it.*

## A Senator Fiddling While Rome Burns

By Gary Kaufman

*The following article expresses only the views of the author and does not express any position on behalf of FFBC. Articles submitted expressing a contrary view are invited and will be welcomed for publication.*

The citizens of Iowa are not being well served if all Senator Grassley can manage to do is vote “No” on health care reform. The national Republican Party seems bent on being the modern incarnation of the “Do-Nothing” party. Health care is a mess, and they recommend . . . that we do nothing! Senator Grassley appears to be joining their ranks.

Grassley initially claimed that he wanted to work on a bi-partisan bill, but he immediately drew a line in the sand and proclaimed that there could be no public option. The public option is the only thing that could help ensure affordable health care for all. Currently our health costs are determined by doctors, pharmaceutical companies, and insurance companies – the higher the cost, the worse the insurance coverage, and the more money they all make! No wonder the health care costs are skyrocketing in the United States at an unsustainable rate.

The public option is premised upon a large, *national* population base. It would spread further the risks and potential costs we all face in our health care but that only a few actually experience. It is the only way costs can be reduced for all. It can be done without compromising access or the quality of care. When the Senate committee finally decided to move forward with a bill, Senator Grassley complained that they were moving too fast. Yet this has been a problem for decades and the senators have been hammering on this legislation for almost 10 months. Still, Senator Grassley can’t seem to keep up the pace or concoct a plan that he thinks would be better. If all Senator Grassley can do is vote “No” on health care reform, perhaps it’s time for the citizens of Iowa to vote “No” on Senator Grassley and elect a senator who can work toward real solutions. A senator for change; a senator for solutions; not a senator for the status quo.

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*When things are out of all proportion it’s either funny or nuts. The contrived indignation over the President’s speech to school kids wasn’t funny.*

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## My M.O. (Monthly Observations)

### Beware of Waffle Houses, Chinese Restaurants, and Doughnuts

A few weeks back, my long-time friend and fellow FFBC member John Tompkins and I decided to take a short vacation. Because of circumstances beyond our control, our original plan of spending time along the shores of Lake Michigan got scuttled. We opted, instead, to head south, stopping to visit two state capitols, a Civil War battlefield, and the Clinton Presidential Library and Museum in Little Rock, Arkansas. A big part of our travel experience was to avoid, as much as possible, interstate highways. We were in no particular hurry to get to any of our destinations and wanted to see as much of the countryside as possible by taking the roads less traveled.

I have to say that once into Missouri—and later Arkansas--the ugly reality of life in America began to manifest itself. We lost count of the number of towns we went through that individuals who lived along the highway had posted “NoBama” signs, usually within shouting distance of businesses that sold guns—all kinds of guns. It makes one wish the founding fathers had made a spelling error in the Second Amendment to the Constitution to read “the right to bare arms” instead of “the right to bear arms.” There is nothing scarier than poorly educated and uninformed people toting weapons of destruction. Be that as it may, we continued our progress southward.

Our stop in Jefferson City to see the Missouri State Capitol—an impressive structure—was marred by bad timing. Outside the building, the Missouri version of the Million Man March was under way, but it was labeled, “The Thousand Man March.” Regardless of the number, it was disconcerting to see. Once inside, we were hampered by a graduation ceremony of Officer Candidate School individuals. We both agreed, however, that it was worth the trip just to see all those young men in uniform!

Upon arrival in Arkansas, we stopped for lunch at The Waffle House north of Little Rock. It is a chain of restaurants specializing not only in waffles but also in waitresses with aggravating southern accents yelling out their customers’ orders to the cooks behind the counter. It was the noisiest restaurant I have ever been in, and it was a relief to get out of there and off the main road.

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*Death stalks us all. To see this graphically, regularly read the obituary page; over time you will see the range of birthdates more and more overlap your own, and see the average creep ever closer. If newspapers came with sound effects, you’d hear an inexorable thud of heavy footsteps growing ever louder.*

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# FFBC

*First Friday  
News & Views*

*Des Moines, Iowa*

**NOVEMBER 2009**

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## **My M.O. (Monthly Observations) Beware of Waffle Houses, Chinese Restaurants, and Doughnuts (cont.)**

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The return trip also resulted in a bit of bad timing but fun nonetheless. Over the years, I have heard some of my redneck relatives wax not so eloquently about their visits to Branson, Missouri. I determined it was one place I never wanted to see. Billboards along the route advertised Branson attractions such as the world's largest banjo and a "family" exhibit about the sinking of the **Titanic**. How anyone could make a "family" exhibit about the unfortunate destruction of 1,500 lives is beyond me, but in Branson, all things are possible.

We approached Branson around noon and were hungry. We pulled off onto the main drag of the town and settled on The Great Wall Super Chinese Buffet for lunch. It was a typical Chinese restaurant with suitable Chinese décor, Asian staff, and steam tables brimming with favorite Chinese foods. Once we had settled down at our table and began to eat, we became aware of the Muzak playing overhead. In a Chinese restaurant, one would expect to hear the strains of music from the Orient, but in Branson, The Great Wall Super Chinese Buffet treated its customers to the country singer Marty Robbins crooning out "The Old Rugged Cross" and other Christian hymns. No one in the entire restaurant but us thought this the tiniest bit strange, and we began to laugh and did so through the entire meal.

Our final evening stopover before returning home was in Sedalia, Missouri, where we stayed in a mom and pop motel. They are so much more interesting than those national chain places. I asked the proprietor where we could get a good meal, and she readily recommended Perkins just down the road. I told her we wanted a meal where we could get a glass of wine with our dinner, and a perplexed expression came over her face. She finally said to try a place on the far side of town which we eventually did. It was not much of a restaurant, and our choice of wine was Chablis or Chablis. We chose Chablis.

The next morning, we wanted coffee and donuts for breakfast. Every place we stopped in Sedalia had no donuts—nor in Marshall thirty miles north. Not any of the three places in that town open at that hour of the morning had donuts. When we finally got to Princeton, Missouri, just a few miles south of the Iowa border, we found a Casey's that had fresh donuts, and even though it was now near noon, we bought one just to say we could find a donut in Missouri!

I believe Noel Coward said it best: "Travel, they say, improves the mind—an irritating platitude—and frankly, *entre nous*, very far from true." That certainly applies in this case.

Steve Person