

# PEOPLE'S WORLD

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## Wildfires grow while budget to fight them is depleted



By Blake Deppe

**W**ildfires have been blazing on all summer, and the latest of them is occurring in Oregon, near the Columbia River Gorge. Owners of 140 homes have already evacuated, and despite the efforts of 400 firefighters, the flames have continued to spread over five square miles. Meanwhile in northern Idaho, another brushfire has burned across 64 square miles and destroyed five structures. But efforts to combat the blazes may be fruitless, because the money to fight them is running out.

Tom Vilsack, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, said Aug. 5 that the U.S. Forest Service's annual budget for fighting wildfires is rapidly dwindling; in fact, it may run out by the end of the month. The fires, on the other hand, will keep burning. He suggested they were in the midst of a catch-22, as when the Forest Service's funding runs dry, it will need to dip into other projects designed to help prevent future wildfires, in order to put out the ones currently blazing. Specifically, about \$400-500 million will be taken away from such projects, putting the future in jeopardy in terms of further disasters.

Vilsack, who is lobbying for an extra \$615 million for the Forest Service to fight wildfires this year and next, remarked, "When we begin

to run out of money, we have to dip into the very programs that will reduce the risk of these wildfires over [a longer period of] time." And those accounts aren't the only ones that suffer; in the past, they have also had to draw from other programs not related to wildfires. Such a transfer occurred in 2012, when the funding for road repairs in Arkansas' Ouachita National Forest was instead used to contend with fires throughout the U.S.

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The fire in Idaho, called the Big Cougar Fire, is only 15 percent contained, and 200 more structures in its path risk becoming damaged or destroyed unless firefighters can contain it further. Resources are being used while there's still funding for them, and include four helicopters, four

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fire engines, and three dozers. Isolated thunderstorms are expected, but those are unpredictable; rain could help quell the flames, but lightning could spark an entirely new blaze.

One of the reasons the Forest Service and the Department of Agriculture are so hot and bothered over the depletion of yearly wildfire money is due to the likelihood that there will be many more fires. In the past, a depletion of funding by the end of August might have been manageable, but global warming has changed that. Wildfires are now likely to occur much later in the year than August.

“The really amazing thing is that we don’t just see an increase in one or two regions,” said Philip Dennison, a geographer at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City. “We’re seeing it almost everywhere - in the mountain regions, in the Southwest... That tells us that something bigger is going on, and that thing appears to be climate change.”

This increases the risk for firefighters as well - even more reason why sufficient funding is necessary. Robert Bonnie, undersecretary for natural resources with the Department of Agriculture,

explained, “Fire behavior is more extreme now. We’re seeing larger fires. We’re seeing fires where we have more houses and people. That makes them more dangerous and more difficult to fight.”

The money isn’t there because the Republican controlled Congress isn’t doing anything to put it there, according to a report by U.S. News. A bill to overhaul the way wildfire fighting is funded was introduced by Rep. Mike Simpson, R-Idaho - and then promptly abandoned by him. Simpson gave no explanation why.

Vicki Minor, executive director of the Wildland Firefighter Foundation, a nonprofit group that helps families of firefighters killed in the line of duty, said, “Because of these fires, we lose our watersheds, we lose our hunting ranges, we lose our homes. These fire seasons are not going away, and for them to not fund wildfires... I’m just disgusted with them.”



**Blake Deppe is a contributor to Peoplesworld.org.**

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## Wrong way on Iraq

By PW Editorial

**W**e join with other Americans in opposing renewed U.S. military action in Iraq. President Obama, while saying U.S. airstrikes would be limited in scope, also called it “a long-term project.” That is alarming, opening the door for further disasters. At the same time, the Iraqi people, especially its minorities, are facing a terrible onslaught of vicious religious and political extremism. This is a major humanitarian crisis with many thousands of Iraqis, particularly religious and ethnic minorities, being killed or forced to flee. Many lawmakers are saying Congress must approve any military action, and some are questioning the constitutionality of the airstrikes. Those are important issues. But the deeper question is whether there should be air strikes at all.

The fact is the U.S. played a huge role in bringing about the crisis besetting Iraq today. Earlier U.S. administrations aided the suppres-

sion of democratic expression in Iraq under Saddam Hussein, including the extermination of Communists, trade unionists, and intellectuals.

It is noteworthy that top U.S. ally Britain, while saying it will provide humanitarian aid for Iraq, is declining to participate in military action. Unilateral U.S. use of airstrikes on other countries has become a new and disturbing pattern, and they have not led to positive results. In most of these cases, including the present actions in Iraq, the U.S. has bypassed the United Nations. That is a bad path to go down. The U.S. should stop the bombing and meet immediately with allied countries and agree to stop any financial, logistical or material support, direct or indirect, for ISIS and related groups.

We should work with others including China and Russia in providing vital humanitarian aid for Iraq and support for democratic development there.

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## NAACP blasts refusal to halt voter restrictions

Special to Peoplesworld.org

On Friday, a federal judge denied attempts by North Carolina Gov. Pat McCrory and his administration to have the N.C. NAACP's legal challenge to the massive voter suppression law dismissed. Instead, he ruled that the case will be set for a full trial in 2015. Judge Thomas Schroeder also declined to issue a preliminary injunction that would have stopped the many restrictions on voting to go into effect this November. He said he did not think it would cause irreparable harm to allow the law to be enforced this year.

Many voters will almost certainly be disenfranchised this fall, because of the cuts to early voting, the elimination of same-day registration, straight ticket voting and cutbacks of provisional ballots for people who mistakenly turn up at the wrong polling site.

In response to Judge Schroeder's ruling, Rev. Dr. William J. Barber, II, president of the North Carolina NAACP, issued the following statement:

"If one elderly or young person, black, white or Latino decides she won't vote because of the shorter early voting weeks, the elimination of same-day voting, the confusing ballots without straight party voting and other sections of this voter suppression law that are still standing because of today's court decision, that is indeed an irreparable harm. The harm is irreparable to the voter...and to our democracy.

"The N.C. NAACP understood when we moved for a preliminary injunction, that the bar we had to jump over was quite high. We knew we had to persuade the Court the harm this cruel law would do to African Americans and other minorities would be irreparable if it were allowed to be enforced during the 2014 November election. The Court found that allowing election officials and



others to ask voters whether they had a photo ID—even though such ID's are not required for two more years—would not cause irreparable harm.

"The franchise is not a partisan issue. It is a fundamental issue of our rights as guaranteed to us by the 14th and 15th amendments to the U.S. Constitution and by the 1868 Reconstruction Constitution here in North Carolina. It is a moral issue.

North Carolina was the first state to pass a discriminatory voting law since the Supreme Court's *Shelby Co. v. Holder* decision on the Voting Rights Act, which stopped the enforcement of Section 5 last June and reduced critical protections for voters of color. "This case proved that Section 4 must be fixed so that the Voting Rights Act can guarantee Southern states are covered by preclearance," said Barber. "This case exposes the level to which extremist groups will go to suppress the vote. It shows the danger and risks we face when cases go through the courts instead of being precleared on the front end by the Justice Department.

"This voter suppression law's passage was aided by a political climate in which our Supreme Court—the highest judicial authority in the land—was saying publicly that civil rights had been achieved and we could legitimately eliminate crucial voter protections for minorities."

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## Message from Hiroshima: Abolish nuclear weapons

By Joelle Fishman

**M**atsui Kazumi, Mayor of the City of Hiroshima, Japan, witnessed all of his school mates die when the atom bomb was dropped on his populous city 69 years ago on August 6, 1945 at 8:15 am. That horror lives with him today, and shaped the Peace Declaration he delivered this year to cities across the world.

Standing on the New Haven Green, the City of New Haven's Peace Commission annual vigil heard his declaration along with a proclamation from this city's Mayor Toni Harp calling for the United States to "lead by example in the area of nuclear weapons reductions so we can work towards President Obama's goal of controlling nuclear weapons proliferation and abolishing nuclear weapons."

The reality of the cost of nuclear weapons which sap national resources needed by cities and towns and could obliterate all life, led to a ballot referendum in New Haven where 80 percent of voters called for abolition of nuclear weapons.

Al Marder, chair of the Peace Commission, said peace forces are now calling on the United States to send a delegation to the Third Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons to be convened by the United Nations in Vienna, Austria on December 8 "and take part in the discussions of the humanitarian consequences of nuclear disaster and finally negotiate a ban and total abolition of nuclear weapons."

## OMS aprueba uso de experimentales contra el ébola

Por Prensa Latina

**E**l Comité de Ética de la Organización Mundial de la Salud (OMS) aprobó el uso de tratamientos experimentales para enfrentar el brote de ébola en África occidental, aunque su eficacia y posibles efectos secundarios sean desconocidos.

El grupo de expertos determinó por consenso que teniendo en cuenta las circunstancias de este brote es ético utilizar fármacos experimentales para el tratamiento o la prevención del ébola, aunque su eficacia no esté probada y se desconozcan sus posibles efectos secundarios, siempre que se cumplan ciertas condiciones, según una declaración difundida por la OMS. Este debate comenzó luego que dos estadounidenses que contrajeron la dolencia y fueron repatriados a su país recibieron un tratamiento experimental, al igual que otro enfermo en España. Los dos estadounidenses mejoran su condición después de haber recibido ZMapp, un fármaco experimental, pero el sacerdote español Miguel Pajares, de 75 años, a quien desde el sábado pasado se le administraba ese suero experimental, falleció en un hospital de Madrid.

Los expertos subrayan que la aplicación de esos tratamientos experimentales debe seguir una serie de criterios éticos que incluyen la transparencia sobre la naturaleza del medicamento, el consentimiento informado, libertad de elección, confidencialidad, respeto a la persona, preservación de la dignidad y la implicación de la comunidad.

La OMS dejó claro en un comunicado emitido tras la reunión del grupo de expertos que un tratamiento experimental o vacuna contra el ébola sería "un potencial activo" en la lucha contra este virus mortal. Tras afirmar que en los últimos años ha habido resultados prometedores en medicamentos contra el ébola, la OMS admitió que todavía no han sido evaluados en términos de seguridad y eficacia en seres humanos.

Por ese motivo, se reunió este lunes el grupo de expertos para estudiar las implicaciones éticas del posible uso de tratamientos experimentales para tratar la enfermedad.

Los especialistas consideran necesario evaluar los resultados del nuevo fármaco con ensayos clínicos diseñados en las mejores condiciones posibles, a pesar de que las circunstancias no sean las idóneas. Según expertos, el panel dejó sin resolver cuestiones sobre cómo recopilar los datos de esos ensayos de manera ética y dar a la vez una atención óptima a los pacientes, así como los criterios de prioridad a emplear para la distribución equitativa de esas terapias en los países afectados. Varios estados de África occidental están afectados por la actual epidemia de Ébola que ha causado un millar de muertos, la más grave desde que el virus fue descubierto en 1976 en África central, de ahí que la OMS declaró el estado de emergencia sanitaria internacional. El brote empezó en Guinea en diciembre pasado y se propagó a Liberia, Nigeria y Sierra Leona.

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