



# The Green Party of Virginia

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## Highland Pond

by Jonathan Bates

### Beginnings of Highland Beefalo Farm

The genesis of the Hersch farm began soon after Jay Hersch returned from working with the Peace Corps in the mountains of Columbia. Jay had "this notion that [he] needed a plot or parcel of Columbia in America" coupled with "a romance with West Virginia." So, it made sense that he and his wife Pat search for land there. After a time of searching for the "gut feeling" for the land and neighbors in Pendleton County, they decided to move on. Then, in 1972, they visited the Monterey Maple Syrup Festival in Highland County, Virginia, just on the other side of the state line. There, they "fell in love with the county." In 1973, with their "gut feeling" realized, the Hersches purchased their own part of that beautiful landscape.

Just after this beginning, another dream came to life. Jay saw an article on beefalo --- a beef cattle, buffalo mix --- which read, "all you need is good grazing land." The dream came true when, "we bought some heads from N. Dakota," and, "artificially inseminated local cattle" to increase the herd. After some time in the business of selling "beefalo," he developed and marketed his trademark --- Virginia Mountain Grown Beef. Currently Jay keeps a small herd of beefalo to supply limited markets with fresh meat. Although it has had its ups and downs, the Hersches' beef products now have a successful place in the market --- in quick stop stores, prisons, and military outlets.

### Farm Watershed

Home to the Hersch family's herd of cattle and home to my family during weekend excursions, Highland Beefalo Farm is a lovely 400 acres teeming with native plants and animals. The story begins here, like the threads of a web connected, the pond and landscape, the resulting eastward flowing watershed, and the family who dreamed them into reality.

The lifeblood of this farm is the springs that flow through it. Two of these springs flow through wetlands and into a breathtaking one-acre manmade pond, designed and built by Lee Hersch, Jay's brother. Ridges flank three sides of the pond, thus forming a hollow, or holler in native tongue. Springs flow down both sides of the middle ridge. Originally these slow moving springs flowed into a pasture at the base of the ridges forming a wetland. Here, the cattle were allowed to graze keeping the wetland cut back in all but the wettest places. Now a large dam connects the two flanking ridges. At its deepest point, from the pond's bottom and dam's inside edge to the surface and outflow standpipe, the water is about 30 feet deep. The water stretches back up the hollow from the dam. The back two corners of the pond hold the remaining wetlands.

The water running through the pond, down the pipe and out, runs cleanly and slowly over another wetland into the Cow Pasture River. A receding ocean once carved these fields; now only the lonely soil bank river remains. The river, full of prehistoric stone, meanders in all directions, except the ancient path to the sea. One lonely ridge, a short distance away, prevents this water from flowing north into the Potomac River. Instead, this part of the watershed flows south towards the James River and then into the Chesapeake Bay.

Knowing the movement of water around us can change the view we have of the land and have a profound influence on our outlook of the overall watershed and how it might be used to benefit us or how we might impact its natural sojourn. Many of these lasting effects on a watershed occur upstream. The water coming from this farm's mountainside is no exception.

Earlier settlement of these pastures saw many years of the land changing hands and trial-and-error farming, including raising sheep, free range turkey, corn, and small grains, as well as clear cutting. The settlers cleared the lowlands for crops and eventually the highlands for grazing and firewood. This caused unchecked erosion in the steeper areas. However, because the new owners desired to live in harmony with the land, the Hersches planted thousands of red and white pines on the ridges to help heal most of the erosion. Future farming might develop as it did in the past, but for now cattle live here, taking very little, and leaving the rest of the ecosystem to flourish.

Lee dreamed of a pond on the site of his future home, an area to create a habitat and protected land fenced in away from the cattle. Lee wanted to create a refuge for wildlife with the wetland and pond protected from trampling and overgrazing by the cattle. But, by fencing in some of the property, he takes some grazing land, which at first caused some disagreement with Jay. The brothers reached a compromise which allows the cattle into the area when the grasses get overgrown. A protected area provides beautiful scenery, but the cattle can still have managed grazing land.

### A Field Study

On an ecological excursion to the pond I slept under the stars and experienced two days with the pond and its surrounding ecosystem. With my backpack strapped on, I headed out over the pasture towards the pond. Off to my right, as I crossed the Cow Pasture Rive, I saw Jay's herd of cattle, the livelihood of the farm. I continued up the steep backside of the pond's dam, and at the crest I gazed out over the wondrous expanse of a newly filled pond. I saw a newt swimming away, down to the muddy bottom. I traveled along the water's edge to my camping spot. With every step, frogs jumped from their basking spots. The call of a resident piping plover echoed out over the pond.

I climbed to the top of a bald ridge and laid my equipment beside a lone standing walnut tree. I remembered this lovely place very well and the weekends with the Hersches and my family. The remnants of the family picnic table rot here, abandoned many years ago for the two story condo-cabin one ridge over. Time to look at the pond.

The first thing was to inspect the small leaks on the backside of the dam. There are three separate leaks, spread out along the same level. By inspecting the standpipe, I noticed the water level was some distance below the drain. Although I did read that sometimes new ponds take time to seal and it's good to observe them through the first season, these leaks seemed excessive.

I walked the remaining perimeter of the pond and watched more frogs jump to safety and their tadpoles to deeper water. The smell of pines surrounded me. Water beetles motored in circles and water oarsmen swam in graceful dances. Dragonflies were here too, to my surprise, hundreds of many different shapes and sizes.

Just before sunset I saw two Canada geese flying low through the valley towards the pond. It seemed strange at first, but when I heard them skimming over the surface of the pond I understood the reason for their late arrival. They use this pond and its small island for safety from the predators of the night. It's amazing to me how fast they found this nocturnal haven. After all, the pond had existed less than a season.

The following morning, the geese were gone, leaving a dew-laden day. I used a water testing instrument, a pH meter, to collect some preliminary scientific data. I planned to use it to assess the state of the water entering and leaving the wetlands. From the pH data from both above and below the wetlands, I concluded that the wetlands were functioning the way that would have been expected. Water entering the wetlands was very alkaline, while below them pH was close to neutral. Here we see the wetlands acting like a natural filter, reducing or increasing the pH to more of a neutral state. I also noticed iron colored staining in one of the springs draining into the pond, indicating a high iron concentration in that water. It will be interesting to see if in the future this iron in conjunction with the cattle nutrients makes for a problem algae situation in the pond.

I had also brought an anemometer I had built. I set it up on top of the ridge to record wind speeds. Wind is abundant here, and this test will help to determine the feasibility of installing wind generators to supplement the farm's electrical usage.

After a morning of monitoring the pond, I set out for a mid-afternoon walk. On my way around the first ridge I came across the same herd of cattle I saw the first day. I rounded the rest of the property stopping in places to enjoy the time I had left. I made the final climb back to camp where my tent waited under the shade of the tree. The time came for me to go, go back to the job, go back to the city. There I dreamed, dreamed of a place where the birds sing loud, mountains stand strong, the water flows clear, a place both beefalo and the Hersch family call home.

Jonathan Bates, a member of NOVA Greens, keeps himself busy with his advocacy of environmental and socially responsible consumerism, energy and waste efficiency, and community sustainability. He brings this altogether in a small business called Ecological Consulting Services, located in Annandale. You can reach him at [GreanMann@aol.com](mailto:GreanMann@aol.com).

Water from this Highland Park pond eventually reaches the Chesapeake Bay. Pines and a protected wetland here influence the health of the Bay hundreds of twisting and winding creek-and-river miles away.

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## Beyond Corporate Media

by John Balkwill

### The Green Hope for Medical Care

If you or I get pneumonia or break a leg, our misfortune can be a bonanza to others. Through investments in insurance, pharmaceuticals, and private hospitals, the leisure class profits from our pain and suffering. Which is why the U.S. leads the world in both per capita spending as well as spending as a percentage of gross domestic product for health care. But all the spending purchases little for the average American, whose life expectancy is a lowly fifteenth, behind even poor Greece.

Among major industrialized nations the U.S. ranks first in low birth weight babies, infant mortality, and preventable deaths of children under five. Babies are born healthier in third-world Egypt than here. We are last among industrialized nations in immunizing pre-school children, although the Children's Defense Fund points out that for every dollar we spend on immunizations, we save \$10 in medical costs later.

We are the only major industrialized nation which has not ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. Social justice leaders have stated that the U.S. cannot ratify it because our "welfare reform" violates key provisions of this human rights covenant. It is shameful that among our increasing homeless population we find people in need of psychiatric help. Corporate media's response is to report that we are having a "boom."

The United States is the only Western industrialized nation without a national health care plan that covers all of its citizens. Nancy McKenzie, executive director of Health/PAC, has written (The Nation 2/28/94), "The problem is that there is no rational structure of health care in the United States, just a marketplace for the buying and selling of life and death."

Health Affairs (Summer '90) reported that two thirds of Americans polled would prefer a national health care system like Canada's to replace our greed-based system, but despite the people's desire, data from the National Center for Health Statistics indicate that only about 21% of U.S. citizens qualify for our only forms of public health insurance: Medicare, Medicaid, or military/veterans benefits. Compare this to countries such as Ireland (100% insured) or Spain (99%).

Making matters worse, our health care system is the most bureaucratic on earth. We have more than 1500 insurance companies, each with its own forms. Michael Miller reported in Dollars & Sense (Feb. '93), "The United States wastes billions of dollars on paperwork caused by multiple insurers." Common Cause Magazine (Feb. '93) compared the cost to administer Medicare per benefits paid (1.4%) to that of administering private health insurance (17%). The Congressional Budget Office reports that a single-payer health care system would save \$175 billion each year, even after immediately providing health care for everyone, including the 39 million who currently have no hope for coverage.

The December '92 Progressive quoted ousted VP Dan Quayle on the just-elected Clinton, "Some of his ideas on health care reform. . . may be more compatible with ideas of mine than some of the liberals in Congress." Clinton favored a program based on "managed competition," in which big insurance companies would eat little ones and form super-efficient HMO's that would cut costs to the bone. Vicente Navarro, professor of health policy at John Hopkins, reported ( The Nation, 2/1/93), "large insurance companies favor managed competition because the managed care plans they control will grow substantially; most employers favor it because they will pay less. The majority of working Americans and their dependents, who will have to pay more to get the same or fewer benefits, will be profoundly disappointed."

Charles Kahn III was appointed staff director of the House Ways and Means subcommittee on health when the Republicans took over Congress. Kahn designed the "Harry and Louise" TV-attack campaign for the Health Insurance Association of America, directed against the Clinton health reform package because Little Insurance didn't want to be eaten by Big Insurance. Ironically, since that time, the President's plan has crept into dominance, with most who are covered now in some form of managed competition whose massive profits have Republicans supporting President Bill, now that they understand what he's all about.

Corporate media, corrupted by influences which include the medical/industrial complex, have sided with greed. They often misinform the public about the Canadian system, which does not offer the tremendous profits that are taken here. The New York Times (10/10/92) boldly claimed, "The debate over health care reform is over. Managed competition has won." Corporate media failed to tell us that "single-payer" had more Congressmembers supporting it (92) than either Republican or Clinton plans during the health-care debates.

With a single-payer system like Canada's, we could choose our doctor and hospital --- choices not always allowed under managed competition governed by the bottom line (one goes to the cheapest doctor and receives the cheapest tests, pills, etc., regardless of medical need). A single-payer system like Canada's costs much less than ours while providing much better health care. The Washington Spectator (1/15/93) quoted Ontario's Premier Bob Rae: "Canadians live longer than Americans. Our newborn babies have a better chance of survival. For all the talk of waste in a 'socialized' system, we spend 8.5 percent of our GNP on health care. Americans spend 11 percent. And all Canadians are covered."

The Canadian system is not socialized. Insurance companies bid with provinces for the right to represent the province as sole insurer. I lived in Canada for two years as a child. My mother was hospitalized there, and when she checked out, our poor family worrying about the expense was told, "You don't owe us a cent ---- it's our job." We can have that in the United States --- better health care without the massive expense or bureaucracy.

A single-payer system would be better for consumers, for social justice, and for the health of our businesses, which compete with foreign corporations that don't have to pay health care benefits to their employees.

I'm proud to be a Virginia Green when I see that single-payer health care is a rock-solid leg of our platform. But we've got to get this information past corporate media to the public, and that's the hard part.

Columnist John Balkwill, a Tidewater Green welcomes response to this column. Please send yours to the editor. One Time Rights 1998 John Balkwill.

## Editor's Response

by Sherry Stanley

### Single-payer Health Insurance

Why wait for national single-payer health insurance? John Balkwill's column calls for single-payer on a national level, but we don't have to depend on our stuck-in-the-corporate-mud Congress to do the right thing. And certainly, past experiences suggest they won't.

A single-payer health plan means that everyone is covered by the same plan and has access to the same services. It is just and compassionate. It should cost no more and maybe less than we now spend and would cover the uninsured and improve coverage for the underinsured. A single-payer plan should be a high quality plan that covers my boss in the same way it covers me. We wouldn't lose coverage when we lose our job or move to another job. I know too many people making important decisions about their life based on whether they have health insurance or not and how much they have to pay for that insurance. A single-payer plan could free us from the burdens our current system impose on us. It would make health care a right, not a privilege.

And we can have single-payer right here in Virginia no matter what the other states are doing. In fact, perhaps we should do this state by state to make sure our plan is more accountable to us. We can have elected health boards that can change our plan if it is not meeting our needs. In other words, this can be financed at the state level, administered at the local level, and delivered at the private level. We need not wait for a benevolent federal government to see the light.

Obviously in a state where NO CAR TAX dominated the last governor's election, we can't wish this into being. We have to work it into being. Some fine folks in Massachusetts introduced such a bill two years ago, called the Massachusetts Health Care Trust. A 1986 referendum had actually directed state senators and representatives to vote for single-payer health care legislation. Another referendum in 1994 echoed the public support. The bill was introduced in both chambers of their legislative body and had an enviable list of co-sponsors. But Massachusetts still does not have single-payer health care. Who opposes this? Obviously, insurance companies oppose it. Drug companies oppose it because they would be regulated by an elected health board. Other groups and corporations who would see their profits reduced under single-payer also oppose it. Formidable opposition, no doubt about it.

But we can make it happen. I have contacted the Massachusetts Campaign for Single Payer Health Care to learn from them. I am willing to help write a bill for Virginia. Naturally, we need Greens sitting in the General Assembly and maybe we can't make this happen until we get them there. But part of what we do is education and introducing this bill will provide that.

Are you willing to join me? I already have some labor union leaders close by who will join us and provide support. What we need are volunteers to research this issue and help write the bill for Virginia (ours probably will be different from the Massachusetts bill in some ways) --- anyone who is interested but especially anyone with a legal background or bill-writing background or health care background. And we need some delegates or senators to introduce the bill. If you think you know a representative who may do this, please let me know. Finally, we need other groups to form a coalition so we don't take this on all alone. If you want Virginia to take the lead on single-payer, contact me and we'll get to work.

## Both Sides of a "Healthy Economy"

by Eric Angel

If you are tuned in to any of the corporate media, you must know by now that the current U.S. economy is doing well, However, that does not reflect the experience of the majority of workers in America. The economy is doing well for investors and CEO's but workers below the \$47,000 annual earnings mark are seeing the brunt of corporate downsizing and shrinking wages in the current economy.

1997 was a very prosperous year for many of the top executives of U.S. Fortune 500 corporations. According to Business Week's listing of CEO pay, the average earnings were 326 times the average worker's earnings. This was a big jump from the average CEO earnings in 1996, which were approximately 209 times the average worker's. Yet, some of those CEO's listed in Business Week were the ones who cut the greatest number of jobs in the U.S.

International Paper announced plans in mid-1997 to lay off 9,125 workers, while CEO John Dillon received a 140% increase in salary. Eastman Kodak wooed Wall Street and cut 20,100 workers in 1997 and in the process increased George Fisher's stock options value to \$60 million. Whirlpool in the last year has cleaned its payrolls of 7,900 workers, while CEO David Whitwam received a 133% raise in salary and stock options from 1996 to 1997. This hardly seems fair that while some individuals and families are devastated by loss of needed incomes, these individuals find profit in their despair.

Workers' pay is shrinking due to the current activity of the BLS. Since 1995 the Bureau of Labor and Statistics has been draining the inflation out of the CPI (Consumer-price index), which prior to 1995 overstated inflation by about 1-1.5%, according to many economists including Greenspan. However, changing the CPI is much like a casino rigging the roulette wheel, since it determines pay increases for 1.7 million union members, social security recipients, government workers, pension benefits for veterans, and income limits for determining the Earned Income Credit on our tax form.

Recent changes to the CPI have deflated its overstatement of inflation by .69% bringing the CPI very close to zero inflation at +.31-.81%. The BLS plans two more revisions to the CPI by 1999 that would reduce the inflation in the CPI by another two-tenths of a percent. Various economists believe that in the next five years the revision to the CPI could save the Fed approximately \$50 billion and increase with each succeeding year. Seventeen billion of the savings would come from social security payments with an additional several billion more coming from veteran pensions.

The growing disparity in wages and property ownership between the working class and the elite is growing to proportions unrivalled in the history of the U.S. However, our elected representatives fail to hear the voice of the people who elected them. They resist efforts to make the minimum wage a living wage, they resist reviving the progressive tax rates of the '50s and '60s, and they increase corporate welfare while decreasing social benefits. Maybe it's about time we resist electing these servants of corporate America, and elect people who understand the needs of their constituents.

There is a Bill right now in House committee named the "Income Equity Act" (H.R. 687) that would limit the amount corporations could pay individuals and still deduct it from their income taxes. Currently the bill has 46 co-sponsors, and needs many more in order to make Gingrich & Company take notice. Write your congressman asking for support of this measure

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### Notes from the Spring State Meeting

In May the Green Party of Virginia held a spring business meeting in Harrisonburg. Before the day ended we had decided to have fewer business meetings, at least on a trial basis for one year. Instead of our usual quarterly meetings, we will have one spring and one fall business meeting and two "other" meetings. The "other" meetings can include hosting a regional gathering or a retreat/teach-in or just a day or two of discussing all the structure and philosophical ideas we never get around to discussing during business meetings. At our 1999 spring meeting we will review this schedule and decide whether to keep it.

We welcomed a new local and a new co-clerk. Central Virginia Greens requested and received affiliation with the Green Party of Virginia. Central Virginia Greens, at their first meeting, resolved to dissolve the Blue Mountain Greens and the Charlottesville Greens and form a new, combined local for Albemarle and surrounding counties. We have hoped for a healthy, active local in the Charlottesville area for some time and feel the time could be now. We nominated, elected, and pushed into immediate service Eric Angel as our new co-clerk. Eric, a member of Blue Ridge Greens, lives in Roanoke with his wife and one-year-old son. He has spent seven of his 28 years working with organized labor and refers to himself as a labor and fair economy activist and an advocate for demanding corporate responsibility.

Five days before the state meeting, Green Party candidate Michael Key had run in Harrisonburg city council elections. The election was for two seats and Michael faced two incumbents, one Republican and one Democrat. With fewer than 10% of the registered voters actually voting, Michael received about 380 votes and each incumbent received about 900. Voters could vote for one or two candidates. Response to Michael's campaign had been quite positive, reflected in the fact that a young college student could get the vote of a third of the people who actually went to the polls that day.

Other discussion of the day centered around proposed bylaws amendments, congressional elections, a boycott of Philip Morris products, and the proposed Interstate-73, which would run from Michigan to South Carolina.

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