**Summary:** The glory days of the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) were the 1980s when it was championing the Sandinistas and fighting against Ronald Reagan. Latin America has dramatically changed since then, but WOLA hasn’t.

Why Pinochet? Despite a long line of military dictators in Latin America, left-wing political activists reserve their worst venom for the late Chilean strongman Augusto Pinochet. Pinochet abused the rights of his countrymen, for which he deserves condemnation, but he also peacefully stepped down from power, leaving behind a functioning democracy and Latin America’s strongest economy. Compare him to the faceless generals who ran Argentina during part of his rule. They launched an insane war with Great Britain over a group of tiny south Atlantic islands and passed on a dysfunctional state and basket-case economy to their successors. So why do the activists hate Pinochet so much more?

Because he ousted a Marxist. Salvador Allende was named president by Chile’s parliament in 1970 after he won a plurality of only 36.3% of the popular vote in a three-way race. During his presidency, as a CNN profile notes, “Allende pursued a leftist program, pushed ahead in part by more radical allies he did not control. His government established diplomatic relations with Cuba and moved Chile closer to communist countries such as China, North Korea and North Vietnam.”

The Chilean military overthrew Allende on September 11, 1973. Activists have searched high and low for evidence that the U.S. is responsible for his downfall, but it is likely that Allende’s opponents would have toppled him without any foreign encouragement because they rejected the socialist blueprint he put forward. Desperate to kick-start Chile’s moribund economy—which Allende had left in tatters—Pinochet undertook wide-ranging free-market reforms, urged on by U.S.-trained economic advisors. Leftists the world over will never forgive him for spoiling their socialist fantasy of what Chile might have been.

If Chile was the Left’s great tragedy, then Cuba is its success story. Ever since Fidel Castro took power there in 1959, Latin America’s hard Left has looked to Cuba’s example. In the U.S., activists have worked tirelessly to persuade the public and the media that events in Latin America patterned on the Cuban model deserve our sympathy and support. The activists turn a blind eye to evidence of leftist human rights abuses. During the Cold War they dismissed or explained away pro-Soviet actions by Latin American leftists.

Today the U.S.S.R. is no more, and Latin America has a long history of downplaying human rights abuses by leftists such as Cuba’s Fidel Castro (above left), while criticizing right-wing strongmen such as the late Augusto Pinochet of Chile (above right).
America’s would-be revolutionaries have abandoned armed struggle for politics. Yet in Washington, D.C. there are still activist organizations that won’t give up. Left-wing dreams die hard.

Consider the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), the principal group in Washington that lobbied on behalf of Latin American “national liberation” groups. Founded in 1974 by left-wing religious activists, WOLA’s stated mission is to promote “human rights, democracy, and social justice” throughout Latin America. It condemns human rights abuses and undemocratic practices by right-wing governments and movements—and it is right to do so. But WOLA has a history of making excuses when the offenses come from the Latin American Left. And the condemnations of left-wing human rights abuses it does make ring of tokenism because they are so rare.

All’s Well with Fidel
WOLA claims to be an unflinching advocate of human rights in Latin America, but, shamefully, the group admits that it did almost no work on Cuban policy from its founding in the 1970s until the mid-1990s. WOLA’s excuse is that 40 years of unmovable U.S. policies made it impossible to address—and it is right to do so. But WOLA has a history of making excuses when the offenses come from the Latin American Left. And the condemnations of left-wing human rights abuses it does make ring of tokenism because they are so rare.

By ignoring Castro, whose human rights violations are too egregious to need recounting here, WOLA brings into question the moral authority it claims for itself.

Amazingly, the WOLA website on Cuba condemns a 2003 crackdown on dissidents as “repression of dissent,” but then states:

“While responsibility for these and other violations of human rights in Cuba lies with the Cuban government, U.S. policy has done nothing to improve the human rights situation, and in fact the activities of representatives of the U.S. Interests Section in Cuba helped provoke this crackdown.” [Emphasis added.]

According to an April 2003 news release, WOLA executive director William Spencer, in a letter to then-Secretary of State Colin Powell, wrote:

 “[W]e can understand how the Government of Cuba has perceived some of Ambassador [James] Cason’s actions—such as meeting publicly with dissidents while criticizing their government to the press—as provocative...At the same time, we do not agree that the actions of the U.S. Interests Section in any way justify the recent arrests.”

This begs the question: How would WOLA have reacted if during the 1970s someone had described a meeting between Argentine dissidents with American democracy activists as “provoking” a crackdown by the Argentine junta?

“Despite Cuba’s serious human rights problems,” writes WOLA staffer Coletta Youngers in Thirty Years of Advocacy for Human Rights, Democracy, and Social Justice, WOLA’s official history, “WOLA had always opposed U.S. efforts to overthrow the Castro government and had recognized its real achievements in the areas of education, health care, and social equality.” Yet these “achievements” are hype. Cuba enjoyed one of the highest standards of living and rates of literacy in Latin America before Castro came to power. His supposed achievements matter little to the thousands of ordinary Cubans who risk life and limb every year sailing makeshift inner-tube rafts across a 90-mile stretch of shark-infested ocean waters in the hope of reaching U.S. soil.

There are valid arguments against the current U.S. policy of isolating Castro’s regime. Castro uses the embargo to justify keeping the island in a political state of siege and squalor. Greater contact between ordinary Cubans and U.S. travelers and businessmen could promote democratic ideas in Cuba. But WOLA’s ties to radical Latin American groups friendly with Castro and its Johnny-come-lately act make it difficult to take its proposals in this area seriously.

The Opium of the Masses Proves Useful
The seed for WOLA was planted by the response of American activists to the events in Chile. In the WOLA official history author Youngers writes that a group calling itself the...
Latin American Strategy Committee (LASC), “an ecumenical coalition of church-related and other activists,” met on September 13, 1973, two days after the Pinochet coup, for discussions that led to WOLA’s formation: “In short, WOLA was a product of the Pinochet coup,” LASC traced its own roots to 1965 when President Lyndon Johnson ordered U.S. intervention in the Dominican Republic because he feared a communist takeover there.

According to Youngers, “LASC and later WOLA grew out of a convergence of factors that profoundly affected both Latin America and the United States.” The most important was the 1959 Cuban Revolution, which “raised hopes for many about the possibilities of fundamental change.” Remember that Castro seized power through force of arms. WOLA struck a similar tone 20 years later, when the Sandinistas took over Nicaragua. “WOLA welcomed the overthrow of the repressive, corrupt Somoza dynasty in Nicaragua,” in July 1979, writes Youngers. So much for WOLA’s stated commitment to democracy.

WOLA also was a product of “liberation theology,” which once swept through Latin America. While claiming to advance the “social teaching” of the Catholic Church, liberation theology is little more than Marxism in a priest’s collar.

Liberation theologians encouraged what they called “Christian base communities” to work with Latin America’s poor. Base community activists, according to LASC founder Thomas Quigley, a policy adviser to the U.S. Catholic Conference, gave the poor “a more active, organized engagement in larger society.” The activists did not help the poor improve their lot through enterprise and democratic participation, but instead pursued more politicized and radical tactics, recruiting people into “cooperative associations, campesino unions, or other organizations that, in time, merged with others to form mass-based movimientos populares” (popular movements). The “other organizations” would include violent guerilla movements.

To energize WOLA in its early days the Catholic Left joined forces with the largely Protestant National Council of Churches (NCC). WOLA’s first director was Diane LaVoy, who earlier represented the Friends Committee on National Legislation at LASC meetings.

WOLA was quick to denounce rightist repression and tout allegations that the U.S. was involved in propounding right-wing governments. One of its most successful campaigns was to shut down the International Police Academy, which was operated by the Office of Public Safety (OPS) of the U.S. Agency for International Development. Youngers notes, “LASC members were concerned that through the OPS, the United States was teaching interrogation techniques that were later employed in torture centers in Uruguay, Chile, and Brazil.” WOLA helped push Congress to shut down OPS in 1975.

WOLA has long relied on religious left groups for support. When Joseph Eldridge succeeded Diane LaVoy as WOLA director, his salary was paid by the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries. The board, according to a 1984 Heritage Foundation report, “The Left’s Latin America Lobby,” also funded the NCC and “the National Network in Solidarity with the Nicaraguan People, a group founded ‘to support and defend the Nicaraguan revolution’ and other solidarity groups that assist the Salvadoran rebels.”

Many American Catholics were particularly disturbed by the involvement of the Maryknoll religious order in WOLA’s radical political activities. The order has a long history of political activism. For example, each year it holds a “vigil” outside Fort Benning, Georgia, to protest the U.S. Army’s School of the Americas (SOA), which trains Latin American military personnel. During the 1980s, WOLA and the Maryknolls alleged that the SOA was training soldiers who would later commit human rights violations in their home countries. Today, democratically-elected governments are the rule not the exception across Latin America, and civil wars are a thing of the past. Yet the Maryknolls persist in this campaign, even though U.S. assistance could help Latin American countries professionalize their militaries. (A better argument against the SOA might be that U.S. taxpayers shouldn’t be funding the training of foreign militaries.)

WOLA’s first paid staff member was Jo Marie Griesgraber, a Maryknoll nun who began as a volunteer, but later, according to
Today members of religious groups continue to be a presence on the 20-member WOLA board of directors. Board members include Richard Erstad, director for Latin America of the American Friends Service Committee; Martin Coria of the Church World Service, Charles Currie, S.J., president of the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities, and Marie Dennis, director of the Maryknoll Office of Global Concerns.

Funding

WOLA initially survived on about $8,000 a year, but its resources grew to $115,000 by 1980 and $450,000 by 1985 as Protestant church groups provided more and more funding. These included the American Baptists, Church of the Brethren, Church World Service, Disciples of Christ, Episcopal Church, Lutheran Church of America (N.Y.), the Mennonite Central Committee, United Church of Christ, United Methodist Church, and United Presbyterian Church in the USA. Catholic donors included the Capuchins and Jesuits, the U.S. Catholic Conference and the Maryknoll Fathers, who would become WOLA’s biggest religious funder.

The Ford Foundation began funding a WOLA internship program in 1979—the year the Sandinistas took over Nicaragua. Ford has remained a steady funder, and the current chair of the WOLA board, Alexander Wilde, was previously head of the Ford Foundation’s office in Santiago, Chile, a position he took in 1993 after serving as WOLA director. From 1999 to 2005 the Ford Foundation gave WOLA $2,288,000 in grants, at least $1,025,000 of which was for general support. The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation gave WOLA $230,000 from 1999 to 2003. It’s highly unlikely that either Henry Ford or John D. MacArthur, both conservative businessmen, would have approved financial support for WOLA’s left-wing politics. (For more on the MacArthur Foundation, see the August 2003 and September 2005 editions of Foundation Watch.)

WOLA’s 2005 tax return (IRS Form 990) shows revenue of $1.4 million. In 2004-2005 the Public Welfare Foundation, an early WOLA funder and donor to many left-wing causes, gave it $100,000. Other major donors include:

* Arca Foundation ($115,000 during 2000-2003, at least $75,000 of which was for improving U.S. relations with Cuba).
* General Service Foundation ($370,000 during 1999-2005).
* William and Flora Hewlett Foundation ($300,000 during 2001-2002).
* John Merck Fund ($515,000 during 1999-2004).

Today’s environmental activists are well-established Washington insiders determined to impose their ideals on the rest of us. In this groundbreaking new book, Bonner R. Cohen, a longtime observer of green do-gooders, traces the rise of environmentalism in America, a movement so thoroughly ingrained in DC culture that the installation of one of its own as Treasury Secretary was barely noticed. Cohen describes how activists created an ideology that now dominates public debate, along with a movement of nonprofit groups that is well-organized and well-funded.
are Sandinista youth groups, women’s groups and a movement within the Roman Catholic Church, known as the ‘popular’ church, which unabashedly supports the ideological goals of the government.”

WOLA endorsed a Sandinista victory in the 1984 Nicaraguan election. That election was boycotted by the anti-Sandinista opposition which was intimidated by government-sponsored mobs and denied access to the state-controlled media. Even the New York Times editorialized: “Only the naive believe that Sunday’s election in Nicaragua was democratic or legitimizing proof of the Sandinistas’ popularity. The result was ordained when opposition parties tamely accepted terms that barred them from power.”

Ortega returned to the presidency in elections last year, pleading to lead a more centrist government than last time. With the Soviet Union gone, he may have no choice, but it’s still too early to tell which way he will go.

Now They Call for Negotiations

WOLA likes to congratulate itself for establishing contacts with “centrist and progressive politicians” such as José Napoleon Duarte, president of El Salvador during that country’s brutal civil war. But while it presents itself as a coalition-builder for center-left democrats, it continues, according to Youngers’ official history, “to relate to more radical social sectors seeking grassroots change in Latin America.” During the Salvadoran civil war WOLA made contacts with the Frente Democrático Revolucionario, the political allies of the FMLN guerrillas (Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional). This is akin to Americans involving themselves in the Northern Ireland peace process by making contact with Sinn Féin, the political arm of the Irish Republican Army.

As a WOLA paper, El Salvador: Is Peace Possible?, issued in April 1990, five months following the collapse of the Berlin Wall noted, a factor that helped make negotiations possible was the fact that “the FMLN guerrillas have seen their actions largely curtailed, largely due to the changes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe”—and why would events half a world away influence these allegedly indigenous guerrillas if not for the fact that they were being supplied by the Soviets?

Even then, some of WOLA’s allies in the region weren’t quite ready to give up on the dream of another Cuba. In November 1989, the FMLN launched a major offensive, during which the Salvadoran military brutally murdered several Jesuit priests, whom they considered friendly to the guerrillas. As Youngers acknowledges, El Salvador’s democratically elected conservative president, Alfredo Cristiani, admitted that “some members of the armed forces” may have been involved in the Jesuit murders. Cristiani’s openness about the Jesuits represented a clear departure in policy from the days of the secretive military dictatorship.

By contrast, as late as 1988, the FMLN was issuing death threats to Salvadoran mayors. Three mayors resigned in December 1988 as a result of such threats—and for good reason. Earlier that year, the guerrillas murdered...
nine mayors, for cooperating with the government’s anti-insurgency programs—which, as government officials, was their job.

Yet, according to Youngers, some WOLA supporters’ main concerns were over the Salvadoran government. “While many supported…a negotiated settlement, much of the solidarity movement did not—though over time many groups moved in that direction,” she notes. And why would they drag their feet on this for as long as they did? “Many observers still thought that a military victory by the FMLN was possible,” Youngers writes.

Youngers adds that WOLA favored the Salvadoran peace settlement and “sought to reach out to conservative think tanks who could influence the administration” of President George H.W. Bush—but why did this have to wait until El Salvador’s bloody war had reached a stalemate and the Soviet Union was imploding?

To its credit, WOLA has denounced Peru’s brutal Shining Path Maoist rebels and Colombia’s FARC guerrillas, which have ties to drug lords—though these two groups are already universally reviled. It opposed the Reagan administration’s invasion of Grenada to remove a communist regime from that small Caribbean island nation.

During the 1980s, WOLA hosted a series of visitors from Latin America, including Luiz Inácio “Lula” da Silva, the current president of Brazil. Lula then and Lula now are two very different political animals. He now rules as a center-left moderate, but at the time he visited WOLA, Lula was a far-left activist and the founder of the Sao Paulo Forum, an annual meeting which the leftist Monthly Review described as a gathering “of representatives from 48 leftist parties, organizations, and fronts—including the Cuban Communist Party.”

The Forum, which first convened in Sao Paulo, Brazil, in 1990, subsequently was hosted by the Sandinistas in 1992 in Managua and by Castro in 1993 and 2001 in Havana. In 2007 it will meet in San Salvador. Its membership of over 100 political parties and organizations includes groups listed on the State Department’s list of terrorist organizations, including the narcotrafficker-linked Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

Another famous WOLA visitor was Rigoberta Menchú, the Guatemalan Indian who won the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize for her activism against government oppression. In his 1999 book about Menchú, Middlebury College anthropologist David Stoll revealed many distortions in Menchú’s account of the Guatemalan military’s human rights abuses. Wrote Stoll: “She drastically revised the prewar experience of her village to suit the needs of the revolutionary organization she had joined.” He concluded that, while many of the human rights abuses she described were real, Menchú stretched the truth to validate her own political agenda.

**Hugo is Boss**

Last month President George W. Bush traveled to Brazil, Uruguay, Guatemala, Colombia, and Mexico in an effort to reinvigorate U.S. ties with Latin America and strengthen the forces of democracy there. However, there is one sizeable obstacle to progress in the region: Hugo Chavez, Venezuela’s democratic president, who denounces “globalization” and embraces Fidel Castro. Reelected president in December 2006, Chavez is bent on undermining Venezuela’s democratic institutions, curtailing press liberties and consolidating power.

Chavez’s heavy spending on popular social programs has won him support from Venezuela’s poor, but his gross mismanagement has put the country’s economy at risk despite its booming oil wealth. Notes Wall Street Journal columnist Mary Anastasia O’Grady, “Under [Chavez’s] leadership, the country has soaring murder rates, double-digit inflation, food shortages, oil-field depletion, and a massive brain drain.” On February 7, 2007, Moody’s Investors Service warned that the state oil company, Petroleos de Venezuela, could go bankrupt if Chavez continues to bankroll excessive social spending.

“WOLA sees its role in this polarized situation as helping to bridge the gap between the two extremes and promoting constructive dialogue,” said Youngers. How? WOLA’s John Walsh condemned “violent confrontations, loss of life, and numerous allegations of serious abuse by state security forces” in an April 2004 briefing to members of the Human Rights Caucus in the U.S. House of Representatives. But ever so even-handedly, he went on to criticize “the use by some within the opposition of what appear to be deliberately provocative tactics.” Walsh noted that, “This is in no way meant to excuse abuses committed by government forces.”

But it is Chavez who is responsible for the crisis of Venezuela’s democracy. He led a failed coup attempt in 1992 against the elected president (for which he served jail time). After his 1998 election to the presidency, he scrapped the national constitution and sponsored a national referendum in which Venezuelans approved a charter that dissolved the senate, extended the president’s term from five to six years, gave greater power to the military, tightened state control over the oil industry, and limited the central bank’s autonomy. The charter also required the press to provide “truthful information.” On January 31, 2007 Venezuela’s parliament rubber-stamped a Chavez demand for the authority to rule by decree for 18 months, citing a claimed national economic “emergency” (for which he would be responsible).

Despite all this, Venezuela is not a high priority for WOLA. Youngers’s history, published in 2004, five years after Chavez came to power, blandly observed that his authoritarian, anti-American rule is “controversial” and had sparked “debates on democratic governance.” WOLA’s website features individual
pages on Mexico, Cuba, and Colombia, but not Venezuela. If WOLA is really serious about doing pioneering human rights advocacy, Venezuela should be its next frontier.

New Issues

These days WOLA works to strengthen non-governmental organizations (NGOs): “WOLA focused on increasing civil society input into project design and development within the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and, later, the World Bank,” writes Youngers. Translation: WOLA wants international NGOs to be in charge of overseeing and administering U.S. development aid.

WOLA plays the Washington NGO game well. Its “first activity,” writes Youngers, “was to persuade members of Congress that the United States should provide $10 million in U.S. arrears to the IDB’s Fund for Special Operations, which supports projects in the five poorer countries in the region.” As a result, WOLA became cheerleader for NGOs, “a regular interlocutor for increasing NGO participation in IDB strategy documents.” Never mind that NGOs are largely self-selected professionals funded by U.S. foundations and based in the U.S., not poor people from poor countries.

The late and great economist Peter Bauer demonstrated that large-scale foreign development aid hurts those it is supposed to help, by rewarding bad governance and displacing wealth-creating enterprise. But his new thinking is lost on WOLA. It steers clear of any discussion of free trade reforms that could actually help Latin America get out of poverty. Youngers scoffs that the Bush administration “has paid little attention to Latin America beyond securing free trade agreements,” as if peaceful, voluntary and non-governmental commerce counts for nothing.

Indeed, in 2003 WOLA announced its opposition to the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) because, well, it’s a trade agreement! In a statement on CAFTA, WOLA rightly criticized U.S. agricultural subsidies, but observed that “Any trade agreement on agriculture must guarantee governments’ authority to pursue tariffs and subsidies that safeguard their nations’ food security, promote poverty eradication, boost crop diversification, improve physical infrastructure and protect the environment.” In other words, free trade agreements are okay so long as they do anything other than liberalize trade.

Moreover, WOLA’s advocacy for “labor rights” in Central America rings hypocritical when juxtaposed against its advocacy of opening trade with Cuba, where Castro has robbed Cubans of rights of any kind and his gross economic mismanagement has robbed them of the most basic labor right of all: the right to earn a decent living.

As Latin America’s politics grow more moderate and technocratic, WOLA is beginning to follow suit. Other new issues on its agenda include efforts to stop gang violence and drug use. WOLA’s drug strategy is to reduce demand, rather than cut off supply—a recognition of how markets work otherwise conspicuously absent from its policy advocacy. WOLA also favors police reform and curtailing violence against women. It provides training for NGO activists in Latin America and has lobbied for more disaster relief after destructive hurricanes and earthquakes.

Despite its increasingly mild tone, WOLA hasn’t lost all its bite. In 2001, WOLA joined the “Stop Otto Reich” campaign to derail President Bush’s nomination of the anticommunist Cuban-born diplomat Otto Reich for a key State Department post.

WOLA unsuccessfully campaigned against the nomination of Cuban-born anticommunist diplomat Otto Reich (above) for a key State Department post.

Organizations like WOLA have squandered their opportunity to become a credible advocate for human rights and economic development in Latin America. For most of its 33-year history, WOLA forged close ties with Marxist and far-left movements whose policies were always wrong and are now utterly irrelevant to the region’s needs.

The socialist dream is fading away, thanks to economic reality more than to military coups like the one staged by Augusto Pinochet. With the exception of Venezuela’s Chavez, Latin American leftist leaders have softened their tone—even Nicaragua’s Ortega speaks more appreciatively about trade and markets. WOLA needs to continue to moderate its own rhetoric and recommendations if it is to overcome its history and past political connections.

Ivan Osorio is editorial director at the Competitive Enterprise Institute in Washington, D.C. The opinions expressed here are his own.
BrieflyNoted

Because three Republican operatives in New Hampshire were convicted of telephone jamming on Election Day 2002 Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-New York) concludes that there surely is a “vast right-wing conspiracy,” a phrase she coined to discredit conservative think tanks and advocacy groups during the Monica Lewinsky scandal. “To the New Hampshire Democratic party’s credit, they sued and the trial led all the way to the Republican National Committee,” Clinton said in the Granite State March 12. “So if anybody tells you there is no vast right-wing conspiracy, tell them that New Hampshire has proven it in court,” she said.

George Soros now says he didn’t mean to compare the U.S. to Nazi Germany when he told a Davos, Switzerland, audience that “America needs to follow the policies it has introduced in Germany. We have to go through a certain deNazification process.” In a letter to the editor of the New York Post, the foot-in-mouth philanthropist wrote this was “a bad choice of words,” and that he does not place “the United States and Nazi Germany in the same moral category.” What he really meant was the U.S. “needs to engage in a profound soul-searching about the harm the war in Iraq has done to others and ourselves.” Is this clarification supposed to make us feel better?

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has been feeling the wrath of the antiwar left. Members of Code Pink, a radical anti-American group whose most visible public face is Cindy Sheehan, picketed the San Francisco Democrat’s home, the New York Times reported March 13. Sheehan previously picketed outside President George W. Bush’s home in Crawford, Texas. Pelosi refuses to meet the protesters. “Every time we say, ‘Will you speak with us,’ she says, ‘Not at my home,’” said a Code Pink spokeswoman. The group was profiled by Professor John J. Tierney of the Institute of World Politics in the December 2006 edition of Organization Trends.

Al Gore’s horror movie An Inconvenient Truth is refuted by The Great Global Warming Swindle, a new documentary film by director Martin Durkin, available at www.youtube.com and video.google.com. Real scientists are debunking Gore’s film, reports a March 13 story in, of all places, the New York Times.

Meanwhile, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) scolded Gore, saying he can’t be a true environmentalist and eat meat. PETA sent Gore a letter claiming that humans’ “meat addiction” is destroying the plant, citing a recent United Nations report called “Livestock’s Long Shadow—Environmental Issues and Options,” which it claims found that raising animals for food generates more greenhouse gases than all cars and trucks in the world combined.

And in other Gore news, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nevada) and Senator Olympia Snowe (R-Maine) have reportedly introduced a resolution that would allow the U.S. Capitol grounds to be used for a massive global warming concert this summer. The Live Earth concert would take place simultaneously on seven continents. One of the groups pushing the concert is the Alliance for Climate Protection, whose chairman is Al Gore.

WorldPublicOpinion.org, a nonprofit, surveyed the citizens of 14 nations asking whether they believe global warming is enough of a threat to justify immediate action. Most respondents said it was a threat, but 48% said they did not believe climate change required immediate action. Just 35% of respondents favored immediate action, and 17% expressed no opinion.

House Appropriations Committee chairman Dave Obey condemned anti-war activists as “idiot liberals” because they questioned his political tactics. The liberal Wisconsin Democrat’s temper tantrum was caught on video. Obey is in a hallway on Capitol Hill discussing a bill he co-sponsored that, he claims, would end congressional authorization for the Iraq war while maintaining funding for the troops. “The liberal groups are jumping around without knowing what the hell is in the bill,” he shouts at two questioners. “You don’t have to cut off funds for an activity that doesn’t exist.” The meeting ends with Obey walking away from the voters and slamming his door shut. The video is available on the web at www.afterdowningstreet.org/node/19392.

GOP presidential aspirant Rudy Giuliani’s law firm lobbies for Citgo Petroleum Corp., a subsidiary of the oil company controlled by Venezuelan strongman Hugo Chavez. Bloomberg News reported March 14. Citgo pays Bracewell & Giuliani LLP $5,000 a month to track legislation, but the firm says the former New York City mayor does not himself lobby. Chavez, who has nationalized several of his economically troubled nation’s industries, has referred to President Bush as a “devil” and a “madman.” Giuliani’s presidential exploratory committee said he “has been clear and consistent — Hugo Chavez is no friend of the United States...chief among the reasons Chavez has so much influence around the world is our ongoing dependence on foreign oil.” Judicial Watch’s blog, www.corruptionchronicles.com, criticized Giuliani. “It is ironic that Giuliani’s firm lobbies on behalf of Chavez. After all, as New York mayor he refused a $10 million donation for September 11 damages from a Saudi prince because he considered the money tainted.”

Ken Blackwell has joined the Family Research Council as Senior Fellow for Family Empowerment. A former ambassador and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development official who ran unsuccessfully for Ohio governor last year, Blackwell will lead FRC’s efforts in addressing family economics, tax reform, and education.