

(R-AZ), \$36,649; Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-KY), \$8,500; Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), \$8,500; Rep. Ron Paul (R-TX): \$7,300, Rep. Charles Rangel (D-NY): \$6,500, Rep. Don Young (R-AK), \$5,500 (source: OpenSecrets.org). I'm struck by how cheaply BP can purchase its influence!

It was right after the rally that I realized that we will survive the climate crisis. I was sitting at a fountain with my feet in the water near Capitol Hill with four young activists from Teva: Emily, Laura, Shmuel, and Yoshi. They were telling me what had inspired them to become activists and about their commitment to build sustainable communities. The five of us brainstormed and came up with some pretty good ideas for further activity. It hit me that the environmental message is getting out, and that the core of committed activists is growing larger, with younger leaders emerging to stand in the footsteps of folks like Arthur Waskow, 350.org's cofounder Bill McKibben, and, of course, Pete Seeger. Greenpeace and other groups have recently succeeded in getting the Cape Cod wind farm built; President Obama is still talking up a green economy; I am confident there will be more such successes in the future.

Three days after my adventure on Capitol Hill, I was in Soho, New York at a benefit for the Gulf Coast Restoration Network. I heard Pete Seeger singing his new protest song, with its surprising chorus: "God's counting on me/ God's counting on you/ Hoping we'll all pull through, me and you." It's a song I now listen to on YouTube every few days (<http://capitaltonight.com/2010/07/ruffalo-seeger-rally-against-fracking-in-song/>). Secularists like me can replace "God's counting" with "the world's counting" and it works just fine.

"Don't give up, don't give in," Pete sings, "working together we all can win./ . . . Let's get everyone involved./ There are problems to be solved." That's advice for us all to heed.

—Marie Parham

Jeffrey Dekro of the Jewish Funds for Justice (JFSJ) is the Moses of community development finance, an activist who parted the waters in the 1990s to bring Jewish organizations

across from non-involvement to active participation. Through The Shefa Fund, the philanthropy that he founded, Dekro convinced Jewish Federations, synagogues, family foundations and individuals to make loans in low-income communities to help provide capital for housing and jobs development. His model was the Hebrew Free Loan Societies, which provided our immigrant forebears with interest-free loans for their small businesses and simple survival needs in an era in which banks generally denied credit to Jews. Dekro applied that model to contemporary times, when communities of color, in particular, have faced redlining, capital flight, and shortages of housing, businesses, and jobs.

A community development movement, with millions of dollars of lending capital provided by Christian denominations as well as secular sources, was already doing transformative work in such neighborhoods when Dekro began asking, *Where are the Jews?* — and made it his mission to bring them to the community-development table. I collaborated in that work by coauthoring a book with him, *Jews, Money, and Social Responsibility* (1993), in which we highlighted several community development banks, credit unions and corporations and advocated for Jewish involvement.

The Shefa Fund merged with the Jewish Funds for Justice in 2006, and Dekro began to focus his community development work on the flooded, devastated city of New Orleans. "The Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR) sponsored a tour there of fourteen faith-based shareholder activists who were looking to pressure insurance companies that were not meeting their responsibilities in New Orleans," Dekro told me recently from his home in Philadelphia. ICCR is a coalition of one hundred and eighty faith-based organizations that pursue socially responsible investing and shareholder activism; the Jewish Funds for Justice, the Reform Rabbinical Pension Board, and the Nathan Cummings Foundation are the only Jewish member organizations. "Some of us were focused not only on the roles of banks and insurance companies but were looking at com-

The Isaiah Fund in New Orleans

munity development opportunities,” Dekro notes. Soon a coalition was in the works, comprising the American Baptist Home Mission Society, CHRISTUS Health (Catholic), Highland Good Steward Management, Jesuits of the New Orleans Province, MMA Community Development Investments (Mennonite), and Jewish Funds for Justice (with support from Jewish Federations of North America, UJA Federation of New York, and the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles). The Isaiah Fund was officially launched by this coalition in May, 2008.

Today the Isaiah Fund is housed at JFSJ and has raised more than \$5.5 million towards its \$10 million goal. More than \$3 million of this capital has been deposited or loaned to community development financial institutions throughout the Gulf region. Half a million dollars went to help build more than four hundred housing units in a mixed-income community called the Muses in Central City, New Orleans. “It’s a project that bridges the cultures of Central City, which is an historically important African-American neighborhood — the Southern Christian Leadership Conference was born there — and the famous St. Charles Avenue, which has historically been white and upper-class,” Dekro observes. “The new housing will help create a demand for new business and drive some economic activity to the Central City side.” A second Isaiah Fund loan of \$400,000 has helped in the neighborhood of Treme to build twenty-one units to replace public housing that was razed by the federal government after the flood.

Most encouragingly, at the end of August, as the fifth anniversary of Hurricane Katrina and the flooding of New Orleans approached, the Isaiah Fund received a prestigious \$100,000 grant from the U.S. Treasury Department’s Community Development Financial Institution Fund, which was established during the Clinton Administration. This kind of government support is likely to leverage other significant capital infusions for the Isaiah Fund.

“The Obama Administration has made it a priority to attend to New Orleans,” Dekro says. “There’s massive work going on to rebuild the levees and make the city safe — and New Orleans just received

a \$1.8 billion federal education grant, which can a tremendous difference in a single city.”

When I asked Dekro about the impact of the BP oil spill on the communities in which he is working and the region generally, he was hesitant about coming to any conclusions. “I’ve had numerous conversations about the oil spill, but it’s a very complicated story because the people on the Gulf Coast are committed to their oil drilling,” he observed. “They are much more on the side of BP, overall, than on the side of the Obama Administration. Notwithstanding the impact of the spill on the fishing industry and on tourism, the bread is buttered down here by BP and the other oil companies.”

These observations were confirmed by Mayor Mitch Landrieu’s remarks at the National Press Club late in August, which indicated that the city will need five more years to recover from the Hurricane Katrina floods — and that this recovery will depend upon the restoration of deep-sea oil drilling, which is under temporary suspension by the Obama Administration. “We are not limited to, ‘Drill, baby, drill’ or stop drilling forever,” said Landrieu. “We can do better. We must drill and restore.”

“Business lending is a lot harder than housing lending,” concedes Jeffrey Dekro, “so right now the economic future of the Gulf lies with BP doing right by these people. That’s what they’re counting on.” Notwithstanding the corporate irresponsibility that motivated him to help create the Isaiah Fund in the first place, he takes encouragement from the fact that Kenneth Feinberg is administering the \$20 billion BP relief fund. Dekro is also beginning to hope against hope that “the impact on fishing is not going to be as horrible as it seemed; the Food and Drug Administration keeps saying that the fish are okay to eat.” His optimism may be warranted only partially by the science — which is beginning to identify oil-spill damages at deep levels of the ocean — but it has personal coloration: When Dekro’s father came to the U.S. as a refugee from Hitler’s Germany, he lived in the Gulf region and met Dekro’s mother at Louisiana State University. “My heart,” Dekro says, “has opened to the Gulf area, especially New Orleans, in a way that it has never opened to any other place but Jerusalem.”

—Lawrence Bush