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BREAKAWAY WEALTH

Congress looks less like rest of America

As income inequality increases, so does political polarization

BY PETER WHORISKEY

BUTLER, PA. — One day after his shift at the steel mill, Gary Myers drove home in his 10-year-old Pontiac and told his wife he was going to run for Congress.

The odds were long. At 34, Myers was the shift foreman at the "hot mill" of the Armco plant here. He had no political experience and little or no money, and he was a Republican in a district that tilted Democratic.

But standing in the dining room, still in his work clothes, he said he felt voters deserved a better choice.

Three years later, he won.

When Myers entered Congress, in 1975, it wasn't nearly so unusual for a person with few assets besides a home to win and serve in Congress. Though lawmakers on Capitol Hill have long been more prosperous than other Americans, others of that time included a barber, a pipe fitter and a house painter. A handful had even organized into what was called the "Blue Collar Caucus."

But the financial gap between Americans and their representatives in Congress has widened considerably since then, according to an analysis of financial disclosures by The Washington Post.

Between 1984 and 2009, the median net worth of a member of the House more than doubled, according to the analysis of financial disclosures, from \$280,000 to \$725,000 in inflation-adjusted 2009 dollars, excluding home equity.

Over the same period, the wealth of an American family has declined slightly, with the comparable median figure sliding from \$20,600 to \$20,500, according to the Panel Study of Income Dynamics from the University of Michigan.

CONGRESS CONTINUED ON A4



Hilda Caldera mourns her husband, former Honduran security minister Alfredo Landaverde, who was fatally shot in his car on Dec. 7.

A grim tally, driven by drugs

Killings surge in Honduras as Mexican mafias expand reach in Central America

BY NICK MIROFF
IN SAN PEDRO SULA, HONDURAS

In the most murderous part of the most murderous country in the world, the families of murdered sons and husbands and sisters meet each month in a concrete building next to the Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe church.

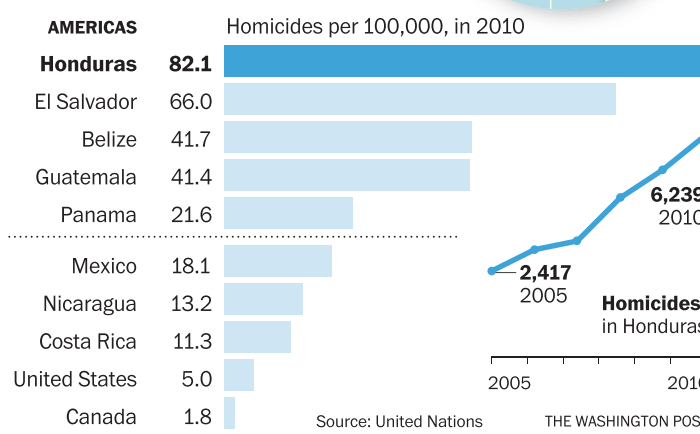
They sit in plastic chairs, leaning forward to speak, and the anguish pours out. There is the dread of birthdays, anniversaries and Christmas. Or knowing who the killer is, and that he will not be arrested, and the perversity of that.

The group had 10 families when it started three years ago. Today it has 60, and all but one of their cases remain unsolved.

"We are living in constant fear," said Blanca Alvarez, wearing a pin bearing a portrait of her dead son, Jason, shot in a carjacking in 2006. "We have had marches for

The murder capital of the world

Honduras had the highest per-capita murder rate in 2010 as Mexican drug cartels expanded smuggling networks into Central America. U.S. officials say the north coast of Honduras is the beginning of a drug pipeline to the United States.



peace, wearing white, releasing white balloons into the air. Nothing is going to change here. Nothing."

Honduras had 82.1 homicides per 100,000 residents last year, the highest per-capita rate in the world, according to a global homicide report published by the United Nations in October that included estimates for Iraq and Afghanistan. Security concerns prompted the U.S. Peace Corps to announce last week that it would pull all 158 volunteers out of Honduras.

As in Guatemala and El Salvador, Honduras's neighbors in the Northern Triangle region of Central America, the homicide problem goes back decades. But as Mexico's billionaire drug mafias expand their smuggling networks deeper into Central America to evade stiffer enforcement in Mexico and the Caribbean, violence has exploded, as if the cocaine

HONDURAS CONTINUED ON A5

U.S. cites gains in housing veterans

VA'S 2015 GOAL: NO HOMELESSNESS

Challenges grow with new generation of vets

BY STEVE VOGEL

Halfway into an ambitious five-year campaign to end homelessness among veterans, the Department of Veterans Affairs says it has made enough progress that the goal is within reach, even as a new generation of veterans returns from Iraq and Afghanistan.

Making aggressive use of a voucher program, Veterans Affairs has housed more than 33,000 veterans in the past 2½ years. It did so by changing its longtime policy of requiring homeless veterans to be successfully treated for substance abuse and mental ailments before being given apartments.

The shift in approach means that there is "a better opportunity to end veterans' homelessness by 2015 than at any time in the past," said Susan Angell, VA's director of homeless initiatives.

Although many agencies, including the Department of Housing and Urban Development, have adopted a housing-first strategy, Veterans Affairs had resisted. "Folks were initially concerned about the safety aspects of it," Angell said. "We wanted to make sure they were clean and sober."

VA and HUD want enough funds to issue 60,000 vouchers at the rate of 10,000 a year through 2014.

The effort comes as tens of thousands of troops who served in Iraq and Afghanistan are leaving military service and entering an often bleak job market.

"For this new generation of veterans, we are very concerned," Angell said.

Her agency estimates that more than 20,000 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans have been homeless at some point during the past five years and that their numbers are

HOMELESS CONTINUED ON A10

Investment in public's ivory towers is eroding

Students bearing brunt as even academic giants scramble for revenue

BY DANIEL DE VISE

BERKELEY, CALIF. — Across the nation, a historic collapse in state funding for higher education threatens to diminish the stature of premier public universities and erode their mission as engines of upward social mobility.

At the University of Virginia, state support has dwindled in two decades from 26 percent of the operating budget to 7 percent. At the University of Michigan, it has declined from 48 percent to 17 percent.

Not even the nation's finest public university is immune. The University of California at Berkeley — birthplace of the free-speech movement, home to nine living



Outside a meeting of the University of California Board of Regents, protesters decry the system's tuition increases. State funding for Berkeley's operating budget has declined significantly since 1991.

Nobel laureates — subsists now in perpetual austerity. Star faculty take mandatory furloughs. Classes grow perceptibly larger each year. Roofs leak; e-mail crashes. One employee mows the entire campus. Wastebaskets are emptied once a week. Some professors lack telephones.

Behind these indignities lie deeper problems. The state share of Berkeley's operating budget has slipped since 1991 from 47 percent to 11 percent. Tuition has doubled in six years, and the university is admitting more students from out of state willing to pay a premium for a Berkeley degree. This year, for the first time, the university collected more money from students than from California.

"The issue that's being addressed at Berkeley, fundamentally, is the future of the high-quality public university in America," said Robert Reich, the former labor

BERKELEY CONTINUED ON A10

Paul's House record marked by bold strokes, and futility

BY DAVID A. FAHRENTHOLD

The passage of H.R. 2121, in fall 2009, unfolded without drama. It allowed for the sale of a custom-house in Galveston, Tex. The House debate took two minutes, and the vote took eight seconds. The ayes had it.

But something historic was happening. On his 482nd try, Rep. Ron Paul (R-Tex.) had authored a bill that would become law.

Paul has become a surprising force in the Republican presidential race, promising to use "the bully pulpit of the presidency" to demand deep cutbacks across government. But Paul has had only limited success using his current pulpit — a seat in Congress — to rally lawmakers behind his ideas.

Of the 620 measures that Paul has sponsored, just four have

made it to a vote on the House floor. Only that one has been signed into law.

House colleagues say the genial Paul has often shown little interest in the laborious one-on-one lobbying required to build a coalition behind his ideas. This year, for instance, Paul has sponsored 47 bills, including measures to withdraw from the United Nations, repeal the federal law banning guns in school zones and let private groups coin their own money.

PAUL CONTINUED ON A5

Gingrich the war expert

The GOP contender's reputation for big ideas has given him entry to the inner circle of military leaders. A2

Iowa, still up for grabs

As ads hurt Gingrich and old writings dog Paul, Romney makes a push and Santorum shows signs of life. A3

INSIDE

STYLE »

A new nation, a new embassy

South Sudan's representatives in Washington prepare for their coming-out party. C1

HEALTH & SCIENCE

No section today

The Health & Science section is off this week. It will return Jan. 3.



THE WORLD

Ahmadinejad, fashion maven

Iran's leader wants the government to offer women clothing that's Islamic but also beautiful. A6

THE REGION

The long walk back

Victor Robinson, one leg lost to a Metro train, is working hard at rehab. B1

SPORTS »

A coach's tough road

Mike Shanahan concedes for the first time that the job of returning the Redskins to competitive form was bigger than he expected. D1

Wizards, Capitals fall

The Wizards drop their season opener, 90-84 at home to the Nets, and the Caps lose in Buffalo, 4-2. D1



ECONOMY & BUSINESS

Bypassing the dollar

China and Japan, the world's second- and third-biggest economies, move to trade their currencies directly. A9

Honduras grapples with surge in killings

HONDURAS FROM AI

were gasoline tossed on a fire.

Honduras's grim tally reached 6,239 killings in 2010, compared with 2,417 in 2005, and researchers say the count will be even higher this year. The largest number of homicides occurred here around San Pedro Sula, a once-booming manufacturing center that is fast becoming the Ciudad Juarez of Central America.

That troubled city on the U.S.-Mexico border and San Pedro Sula share more than a reputation for low-wage assembly plants and fratricidal violence. They are at opposite ends of the billion-dollar smuggling chain that extends from the north coast of Honduras to the United States.

It starts on the isolated beaches and jungle airstrips of Honduras's Mosquitia region, where 95 percent of the suspected drug flights from South America to Central America land, according to U.S. narcotics agents. U.S. radar detected 90 such flights into Honduras last year, compared with 24 in 2008, marking a major shift in trafficking patterns that indicates a strong preference for the country's rugged geography and feeble institutions.

In March, authorities raided a cocaine processing lab in the mountains near San Pedro Sula. The facility was the first of its kind in Central America, capable of churning out a ton of powder each month by combining imported coca paste with hydrochloric acid and other chemicals.

Then, in July, a semi-submersible "narco submarine" with \$180 million worth of cocaine was caught by the U.S. Coast Guard in international waters off Honduras, the first such craft detected in the Caribbean. Since then, three more have been busted.

Honduran lawmakers voted overwhelmingly last month to deploy the country's military against drug traffickers, adopting the security strategy charted by Mexican President Felipe Calderon with mixed results.

Overall, U.S. officials estimate that 25 to 30 tons of cocaine arrive in Honduras each month by air and sea — one-third of the world's

total volume — before continuing north into Mexico through Guatemala and Belize on fast boats, fishing vessels or cargo trucks.

"Honduras is by far the world's largest primary transshipment point for cocaine," said a U.S. official working here who spoke on the condition of anonymity, citing security protocols.

Shepherding the precious merchandise is a dangerous but lucrative occupation, as the payoff to local smugglers for receiving an average-size payload of 500 kilograms and delivering it to Guatemala can be \$1 million. Honduran police commanders say smugglers are also increasingly paying their contacts in raw product rather than cash, driving up local drug-dealing and the lethal violence that accompanies it.

'Total impunity'

Researchers caution that the surge in killings here cannot be attributed entirely to narcotics trafficking. As in Ciudad Juarez, drug-fueled violence appears to have fostered an overall climate of impunity, in which bullets settle the slightest dispute and anyone can literally get away with murder.

Journalists, labor activists and gays also are apparently being killed at elevated rates, and political violence has flared since the 2009 coup that deposed leftist President Manuel Zelaya. Then there are the thousands of other Hondurans who seemingly have nothing to do with the drug trade who have been slain in carjackings, muggings and hotheaded feuds.

"You always imagine that your parent will die of old age, not murder," said Claudia Castillo, whose father, who drove a grocery delivery truck, was killed last December in San Pedro Sula for falling behind on extortion payments, which gang members here call the impuesto de guerra ("war tax"). He had been mugged, assaulted or shot at on at least eight other occasions, Castillo said, including an incident a few months before his death in which teenage gangsters ordered him to dance and fired at his feet.

"We begged him to quit, but he said he had to pay for us to go to college," Castillo said. After bury-



PHOTOS BY ORLANDO SIERRA/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE VIA GETTY IMAGES

Police seal off the site where a woman's body was found recently in the Arturo Quezada suburb, on the outskirts of Tegucigalpa, Honduras.



Students from the National Autonomous University of Honduras hold a candlelight vigil in Tegucigalpa in October for victims of violence. For more images, go to washingtonpost.com/world.

ing him, her family moved to another neighborhood after receiving new threats from the gang.

At nearly every business here, from Burger King to the smallest mini-market, armed men with 12-gauge shotguns stand guard. Those who can afford it barricade their families behind razor wire, 10-foot walls and electrified fencing.

"If a person kills someone and the next day they're sitting in a restaurant drinking coffee as if nothing happened, then that person feels they have permission to

kill anyone they want," said Jose Antonio Canales, a priest who works with the support group for victims' families. "There is total impunity."

Gang warfare

For much of the 20th century, Canales said, the north coast of Honduras was a place of opportunity, drawing workers to the vast banana plantations owned by U.S. fruit companies. In the 1980s, as civil wars raged in Nicaragua, Guatemala and El Salvador, Honduras and especially the San Pedro

Sula area were held up as a model of export-driven development, attracting waves of workers to the assembly plants known as maquilas.

"People came from all over, but when they didn't find opportunity, the pockets of misery formed," Canales said. "Then a lot of kids were raised by a single mom or a grandmother because their parents were in the United States."

The transnational gangs MS-13 and 18th Street took root in the city's slums and have been warring ever since, reinforced by deported criminals from Los Angeles street gangs and U.S. prisons.

The United States has been drawn deep into Honduras's counter-drug fight, spending at least \$50 million on security assistance since 2008, according to U.S. officials.

"This is a poor country where 65 percent of the people live in poverty and the government's law enforcement budget cannot begin to compare to the funds that drug trafficking organizations have," U.S. Ambassador Lisa Kubiske said in an interview here. "It's clear the country needs help."

Armed American drug agents are on the front lines of anti-narcotics operations, launching helicopter raids into the jungles of Mosquitia from the Soto Cano air base, where the United States has

a large military presence. U.S. advisers are teaching police how to gather evidence and are helping modernize Honduras's ghoulish prison system. The United States has provided armored vehicles to protect judges from assassination and sophisticated mobile X-ray equipment that can scan vehicle cargo at checkpoints and border crossings.

But setbacks have undercut recent security improvements. On Dec. 7, former security minister Alfredo Landaverde — an outspoken critic of growing police corruption tied to organized crime — was gunned down in his car, a day after assassins pumped 37 bullets into the vehicle of radio journalist Luz Marina Paz Villalobos. Since then, Honduras's Congress has banned all motorcycle drivers from carrying passengers, because both victims were slain by hit men riding on the backs of motorbikes.

"It doesn't matter if you're a good or a bad person here, or if you're someone with a future," said Irwin Santos, whose brother Deybis — a university student — was killed in 2008 in San Pedro Sula. "In the end, you become just another statistic."

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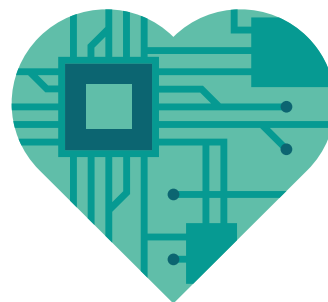
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