

GUEST VIEWPOINT

Science fairs foster love of learning in students

By Mary Eileen Wood

Last month in his State of the Union address, President Barack Obama applauded science fairs: "Maintaining our leadership in research and technology is crucial to America's success. But if we want to win the future — if we want innovation to produce jobs in America and not overseas — then we also have to win the race to educate our kids. ... We need to teach our kids that it's not just the winner of the Super Bowl who deserves to be celebrated, but the winner of the science fair."

Every middle and high school student, every family and community in Tompkins County, has a great regional science fair at which to celebrate a love of science or engineering — and our youth will need those skills to win the future.

The Dr. Nelson Ying Tri Region Science and Engineering Fair (www.YingTRSEF.org) in Syracuse gives students from 24 counties reasons to explore the world and seek mentors to guide them. We offer days of fun, and we gather judges and awards for encouragement. Caring adults applaud. Every skilled trade union and tech company can send judges and awards for Fair Day. The entire community helps these youth win the future.

Project Lead the Way students and 4-H-ers have great topics ready to bring to the Ying TRSEF as posters. Dr. Carlyn Buckler has buckets of dirt at the Museum of the Earth so students can discover fossils as part of the museum's ongoing research. Cornell Lab of Ornithology even has a new website to jumpstart science projects (tinyurl.com/64nrzyzp).

Why are science fairs so important for kids? Each project gives meaning to what they learn in school, gives purpose to the tools their teachers provide and gives reality to the need to learn. The students of today will forge the future; they need to be prepared. Science fair experience empowers them to win the future.

Over the past 16 years, I have seen thousands of children and teens celebrate Fair Day, and talk knowledgeably about such a range of topics it takes my breath away. Whether they are 11-year-olds or soon-to-graduate seniors, these rising experts give me an abiding hope for the future.

What do they have in common? People like you! People who make sure kids get to the library for the book about ... well, about whatever fascinates them. People who drive them to each science fair so they have a chance to discover their talents. People who serve as judges and fair volunteers to create a rich experience for students.

Basketball and computer games are not the only things kids can love. There is a world they ache to know. With a science fair, they can do exactly that. With easy tools such as www.sciencebuddies.org, it's not brain science.

Wait a minute — let me take that back. It is brain science. It is each student taking the brain he or she was born with and using it to ask questions and go find the answers. Combine that brain with the important tools provided in classrooms every day and youth can do the real-world work of exploring and learning and preparing for apprenticeships, college and careers.

Kids have the brains. You've got the science fair. So, let's win the future!

Wood is director of the Dr. Nelson Ying Tri Region Science and Engineering Fair.

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When corporations choose despots over democracy

"People holding a sign 'To: America. From: the Egyptian People. Stop supporting Mubarak. It's over!' so tweeted my brave colleague, "Democracy Now!" Senior Producer Sharif Abdel Kouddous, from the streets of Cairo.



AMY GOODMAN
Commentary

More than 2 million people rallied throughout Egypt last Tuesday, most of them crowded into Cairo's Tahrir Square. Tahrir, which means "liberation" in Arabic, has become the epicenter of what appears to be a largely spontaneous, leaderless and peaceful revolution in this, the most populous nation in the Middle East. Defying a military curfew, this incredible uprising has been driven by young Egyptians, who comprise a majority of the 80 million citizens. Twitter and Facebook, and SMS text messaging on cell phones, have helped this new generation to link up and organize, despite living under a U.S.-supported dictatorship for the past three decades. In response, the Mubarak regime, with the help of U.S. and European corporations, has shut down the Internet and curtailed cellular service, plunging Egypt into digital darkness. Despite the shutdown, as media activist and professor of communications C.W. Anderson told me, "people make revolutions, not technology."

The demands are chanted through the streets for democracy, for self-determination. Sharif headed to Egypt last Friday night, into uncertain terrain. The hated Interior Ministry security forces, the black-shirted police loyal to President Hosni Mubarak, were beating and killing people, arresting journalists, and smashing cameras.

On Saturday morning, Sharif went to Tahrir Square. Despite the SMS and Internet blackout, Sharif, a talented journalist and technical whiz, figured out a workaround, and was soon tweeting out of Tahrir: "Amazing scene: three tanks roll by with a crowd of people riding atop each one. Chanting 'Hosni Mubarak out!'"

Egypt has been the second-



The Associated Press

An anti-government protester holds a banner during demonstrations last Tuesday in Tahrir Square in Cairo, Egypt. More than a quarter-million people flooded into the heart of Cairo last Tuesday, filling the city's main square in by far the largest demonstration in a week.

largest recipient of U.S. foreign aid for decades, following Israel (not counting the funds expended on the wars and occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan). Mubarak's regime has received roughly \$2 billion per year since coming to power, overwhelmingly for the military.

Where has the money gone? Mostly to U.S. corporations. William Hartung of the New America Foundation explains:

"It's a form of corporate welfare for companies like Lockheed Martin and General Dynamics, because it goes to Egypt, then it comes back for F-16 aircraft, for M-1 tanks, for aircraft engines, for all kinds of missiles, for guns, for tear-gas canisters (from a company called Combined Systems International, which actually has its name on the side of the canisters that have been found on the streets there.)"

Hartung just published a new book, "Prophets of War: Lockheed Martin and the Making of the Military-Industrial Complex." He went on: "Lockheed Martin has been the leader in deals worth \$3.8 billion over that period of the last 10 years; General Dynamics, \$2.5 billion for tanks; Boeing, \$1.7 billion for missiles, for helicopters; Raytheon for all manner of missiles for the armed forces. So, basically, this is a key element in propping up the regime, but a lot of the money is basically recycled. Taxpayers could just as easily be giving it directly to Lockheed Martin or General Dynamics."

Likewise, Egypt's Internet and

cell phone "kill switch" was enabled only through collaboration with corporations. U.K.-based Vodafone, a global cellular-phone giant (which owns 45 percent of Verizon Wireless in the U.S.) attempted to justify its actions in a press release, "It has been clear to us that there were no legal or practical options open to Vodafone ... but to comply with the demands of the authorities."

Narus, a U.S. subsidiary of Boeing Corp., sold Egypt equipment to allow "deep packet inspection," according to Tim Karr of the media policy group Free Press. Karr said the Narus technology "allows the Egyptian telecommunications companies ... to look at texting via cell phones, and to identify the sort of dissident voices that are out there. ... It also gives them the technology to geographically locate them and track them down."

Mubarak has pledged not to run for re-election come September. But the people of Egypt demand he leave now. How has he lasted 30 years? Maybe that's best explained by a warning from a U.S. Army general 50 years ago, President Dwight D. Eisenhower. He said, "We must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex."

That deadly complex is not only a danger to democracy at home, but when shoring up despots abroad.

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Talking with the president could be hazardous

As some readers might know, your humble correspondent (that's me) will be conducting a live interview with President Barack Obama a few hours before the Super Bowl begins on Sunday.



BILL O'REILLY
Commentary

The chat is scheduled to last about 12 minutes and is fraught with danger — for me, not for the president. That's because the rules are different when it comes to interviewing the president of the United States. Since the beginning of our republic, only 44 men have held that office, and when a citizen is in the presence of the chief executive, there is strict protocol. For example, he is addressed as "Mr. President." No one says "Yo, Barack, how you doin'?" There is a respect for the office that formalizes all conversation.

I well remember President Bush the Elder telling NBC correspondent Stone Phillips to be "careful" after Phillips asked Bush about a rumor concerning his personal life. The president's tone stopped Stone cold, pardon the pun.

Back in September of 2008, I interviewed then-Sen. Obama on the campaign trail. There was no protocol involved except for civility. I asked Obama a series of specific questions and interrupted him if he didn't answer them directly. I had 30 minutes of his time and made them count because I could say pretty much what I wanted to say.

But that was then. On Sunday, I can ask the president valid questions, but he doesn't have to answer them. He can say what he wants. If I interrupt him too much, I look like a dope. With only 12 minutes to work with, I have to frame my questions with precision. The president is an eloquent man; he could easily run out the clock if he wants to. And the interview is live, so there's no editing. In other words, there's nowhere to hide if things don't go well.

Experienced journalists know that any interview with a powerful person is a chess game. Your job is to get information, to deliver something the audience has not heard. Many times, the interviewee does not want to answer certain questions and, indeed, might even refuse to answer them by spinning or deflecting. With anyone else, I could call the spinner on that. With the president of the United States, you have to be careful, as Bush pointed out.

So I fully expect to get hammered after the interview. Depending on how you feel about the president, the questions will either be too soft or too intrusive. The first time around, the interview benefited both Obama and myself, as it was a virtual free-for-all, a spirited back and forth about a variety of subjects.

This time, I will have to bring a completely different game plan to the White House. The president has home-field advantage, an established presence as the world's most powerful quarterback and the clock running to his advantage. Vegas wouldn't even put out a line on this one. Can't wait to see what happens.

You can contact O'Reilly at info@creators.com.

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