



## Inside Track

### Lame Duck Obama Grabbed More Land and Power

“This arrogant act by a lame duck president will not stand,” tweeted Senator Mike Lee (R-Utah) in reaction to President Barack Obama designating two national monuments on December 28 at sites in Nevada and in Lee’s home state of Utah.

Christy Goldfuss, managing director of the White House Council on Environmental Quality, stated that the action will not allow any new mining or oil and gas development within the monument boundaries.

The Bears Ears National Monument in Utah adds even more land to the control of the federal government, covering 1.35 million acres in the Four Corners region. While Lee and many other residents of the states affected by Obama’s latest executive order reacted angrily, conservationists were ecstatic.

In Nevada, the Gold Butte National Monument has been a site of controversy for more than 15 years. Environmentalists have worked feverishly to stop the expansion of Las Vegas in order to protect various indigenous species such as the desert tortoise.

Obama said his action will “protect some of our country’s most important cultural treasures, including abundant rock art, archaeological sites, and lands considered sacred by Native American tribes. Today’s actions will help protect this cultural legacy and will ensure that future generations are able to enjoy and appreciate these scenic and historic landscapes.”

Homer Cummings, the U.S. attorney general for President Franklin Roosevelt, issued an opinion in 1938 that while presidents could remove land from private use under the 1906 Antiquities Act, they could not reverse such executive actions. Republicans in Congress, incensed at Obama’s repeated use of executive orders to circumvent the will of Congress, are threatening to change the law in January.

This is an opportunity for the Republicans, who now control both houses of Congress and the White House, to rein in both the excessive power of the imperial presidency and the policy of the federal government controlling more and more land in the western states. Whether they will actually do so remains to be seen.

### California Governor Vows to Resist Trump Climate Policies

California Democratic Governor Jerry Brown, who has a record as a strong environmentalist and who has attended the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris and the Climate Summit of the Americas in Toronto, has said that he will take California in a different direction if the incoming Trump administration relaxes environmental regulations or measures to fight against so-called climate change.

In a December 26 interview with the *New York Times*, Brown pledged to bypass Washington and work directly with other nations and states to defend and strengthen California’s environmental policies, which are already the most aggressive in the nation. Following the line prevailing among those who insist that carbon emissions contribute to climate change and global warming, Brown maintains that strict regulations are necessary to prevent such environmental calamities — a theory that has been disputed by many scientists.

“California can make a significant contribution to advancing the cause of dealing with climate change,



Written by [Staff](#) on January 23, 2017

Published in the January 23, 2017 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 33, No. 02

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irrespective of what goes on in Washington,” said Brown in the *Times* interview. “I wouldn’t underestimate California’s resolve if everything moves in this extreme climate denial direction. Yes, we will take action.”

Brown described Trump’s election as a setback for the climate movement, but predicted that it would be a temporary setback: “In a paradoxical way, it could speed up the efforts of leaders in the world to take climate change seriously.... The shock of official congressional and presidential denial will reverberate through the world.”

But the *Times* pointed out pitfalls in the path the Golden State has taken: “The environmental effort poses decided risks for this state. For one thing, Mr. Trump and Republicans have the power to undercut California’s climate policies. The Trump administration could reduce funds for the state’s vast research community ... which has contributed a great deal to climate science and energy innovation, or effectively nullify state regulations on clean air emissions and automobile fuel standards.”

The Trump administration should move quickly and decisively to dismantle and defund the climate-change lobby and withdraw all U.S. support for the UN’s destructive Paris Agreement.

## **Venezuelan Parents Giving Up Children They Can’t Feed**

Poverty in Venezuela is becoming so severe that parents are increasingly “handing children over to the state, charities or friends and family,” reported Reuters December 15.

The nation with the world’s largest oil reserves also has at present the world’s highest inflation rate, a shrinking economy, rising joblessness, food shortages, forced Christmas sales, and currency crackdowns.

For those fortunate enough to have a job, wages average “less than the equivalent of \$50 a month at black market rates,” writes Reuters. (Forget the country’s four official exchange rates, none of which even remotely reflects the bolivar’s real value.) Prices, meanwhile, are skyrocketing, putting necessities such as food and clothing beyond the reach of the growing number of poor. Given the choice between seeing their children starve to death — or, perhaps worse, get involved in begging or prostitution just to eat — and turning them over to others who may be able to feed them, many parents are, with heavy hearts, opting for the latter.

Hunger is a widespread problem in Venezuela, affecting millions. Two-thirds of 1,099 households with children in Caracas told children’s rights organization Cecodap they didn’t have enough to eat, according to a survey released by the group last week.

Some parents are simply abandoning their children. Infants and toddlers have been found in bags and cardboard boxes. Recently, two mothers checked out of hospitals after giving birth without taking their babies.

A social-services center in Carirubana, a municipality on a peninsula far from Caracas, sees “more than a dozen parents plead for help taking care of their children” every day, up from about one parent per day last year, says Reuters. Maria Salas, the center’s director, said, “The principal motive now is lack of food.” The government, despite its professed compassion for the poor, has been no help.

Venezuelans are learning that the hard way. Others would be wise to learn from their experience rather than chase after the chimerical “workers’ paradise” themselves — and end up having to give away their



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own children.

## **Study Finds One in Six Americans on Psychiatric Drugs**

A new analysis published on December 12 in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (JAMA) reveals that approximately one in six adults in the United States is taking at least one psychiatric drug, most commonly an antidepressant or anti-anxiety drug.

The analysis examined three classes of psychiatric drugs: antidepressants; anti-anxiety medications, including sedatives and hypnotics primarily used to treat anxiety and insomnia; and antipsychotics, for patients suffering from conditions such as bipolar disorder and schizophrenia.

The researchers found that 16.7 percent of adults reported filling one or more prescriptions for psychiatric drugs in 2013, of whom 12 percent reported antidepressant use; 8.3 percent reported taking anti-anxiety meds, sedatives, and hypnotics; and 1.6 percent used antipsychotics.

Women were more likely to report taking a psychiatric drug than men. In 2013, one in five women had filled at least one psychiatric drug prescription that year.

The numbers vary dramatically depending on race: 20.8 percent of white adults reported use of psychiatric drugs, compared with 8.7 percent of Hispanic adults, 9.7 percent of black adults and 4.8 percent of Asian adults.

Adults between the ages of 60 and 85 are now the highest users of psychiatric medicines, with over a quarter of that population reporting use, as compared to nine percent among those between the ages of 18 and 39 and 18 percent among those between the ages of 40 and 59.

The majority of adults in the survey who reported taking psychiatric medications have been using them a long time: Eighty-four percent of those who reported psychiatric drug use had filled three or more prescriptions in 2013, which the authors considered long-term use. The most commonly used type of drug was an antidepressant, followed by an anti-anxiety drug or sleeping pill.

With patients and doctors seeking immediate relief for certain symptoms, too many Americans are opting for prescription medications when they may indeed not always be necessary. The JAMA report is just the latest to underscore once more that there is a definite overmedication problem in the United States.



Written by [Staff](#) on January 23, 2017

Published in the January 23, 2017 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 33, No. 02

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