

## ***FIRE IN THE HOLE***

**REAL MONEY column for The Santa Fe New Mexican**

**By Rob Rikoon**

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We face the prospect of protracted periods of wildfires here in New Mexico while the rest of the nation looks on, relieved that nuclear waste doesn't reside in their backyards. Similarly, Greece and the European Union as a whole is racked by a tumult of its own, born from decades of political chicanery and financial dishonesty. No one can possibly know which way the wind will blow, towards or away from the stockpiles of above ground drums of plutonium laced debris, nor can we say with certainty if the EU will survive this phase of the dismantling of national identities.

Which meltdown engenders more fear...a release of radioactive particles powerful enough to kill at micro-dosages or the demise of post World War II Europe? For folks here in Santa Fe, already on edge due to smoke and the possibility of evacuations, the ongoing crisis in Europe is as far away as the moon. For Greek, Irish and Portuguese youth demonstrating in the streets, Los Alamos National Lab problems take up as much mental space as Japanese farmers in the Fukushima district do for Midwesterners trying to navigate their breached levee's flood waters.

Being the eternal optimist, I believe there are positive aspects to both situations. Nature cleanses her forests with burns and people who get into financial trouble due to over spending or not enough earnings learn to adjust, adapt and eventually become adept in their new circumstances. It is painful for some but life goes on. The fires will continue until it rains and despite our discomfort, some species will thrive.

Several peripheral European nations will effectively go bankrupt. Until some big changes take place in the laid back Southern European cultures, either Germany will pay everyone's bar tab with the effect of having a pan continent identity formed, or, a split will occur that will separate the industrial North from the agrarian South. Does that not remind you of the issues facing the US in 1860?

Is there a lesson in all this? The dilemma we face is how to determine what resources are going to be devoted to saving and what is likely going down the tubes anyway, be it decades of downed trees and dried underbrush or nostalgic cultures based on high levels of social welfare. It is not a pretty sight here or there. We like to sweep our intractable problems under the door mat of science; figuring nuclear energy's nasty by-products will be dealt with by experts in the industry and a far sighted, caring government. European bankers and politicians believe that basic imbalances in the work ethic and honesty levels, as exemplified by voluntary compliance with tax codes, between various countries can be papered over by bureaucratic institutions and the creation of financial instruments.

Maybe the experts are right and all we need to do is cooperate, coordinate and consolidate until there is one benign governing body looking after the planet. I wish that where each one of us sits

on these issues mattered and that how we cast our ballots or spend our dollars really had an impact on public policy. For now, the making of fire fighting decisions, whether concerning forests or finances, is an opaque and inefficient process whose success depends mostly on luck and whose progress is managed by public relations. Another approach would be the practical application of holistic wisdom on a small scale, like everyone putting out their own campfire or paying their bills with earned income. It's an old fashioned view that seldom goes out of style.

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