

Noted.

GOOD MEDICINE: “When you’re face to face with a patient, you can’t worry about the fact that they can’t pay,” says Dr. **Regina Benjamin, Barack Obama’s** Surgeon General nominee. After an unsettling flirtation with TV-doctor **Sanjay Gupta**—which caused an outcry from single-payer proponents angered by Gupta’s bashing of public programs—Obama opted for a **MacArthur Foundation** “genius grant” recipient whose career has been spent as a family doctor in the low-income, multiethnic, Hurricane Katrina-battered community of Bayou La Batre, Alabama. When Benjamin says, “It should not be this hard for doctors and other healthcare providers to care for their patients,” she speaks from experience. Just as significant, Benjamin highlights the essential role of publicly organized and funded healthcare programs—as she did at the announcement of her nomination with shout-outs to the **US Public Health Service Commission Corps** and the **National Health Service Corps**, of which she is an alumna. There could not be a better advocate for maintaining a robust public option in any healthcare reform plan. JOHN NICHOLS

WIN FOR WORKERS: Workers at **Hartmarx Corporation** won a big victory in June when a bankruptcy court approved its sale to **Emerisque Brands** and **SKNL North America**. After the Illinois-based manufacturer, which produces Hart Schaffner Marx and Hickey Freeman clothing, declared bankruptcy in January, **Workers United**, the union that represents its employees, launched a campaign to resist pressure from creditors, led by **Wells Fargo**, to liquidate the firm [see “Social Unionism Lives,” June 15]. While other bidders intended to break up Hartmarx, **Emerisque** promised to keep manufacturing its brands in the United States.

The 3,000 Hartmarx jobs are a drop in the bucket compared with the 1.5 million manufacturing jobs that have been lost in the past year. But as Workers United president **Bruce Raynor** commented, the Hartmarx struggle “shows we can save manufacturing jobs.... The banks are not immune to pressure” when they make “quick-buck

decisions.” The workers’ threat to occupy Hartmarx factories helped generate attention. Raynor believes that taking over plants “might be the kind of thing workers will have to do” to keep their jobs.

JOSHUA FREEMAN

PRICE OF DIPLOMACY: Candidate **Barack Obama** famously promised to change “the culture in Washington” by ushering in a new kind of foreign policy and a renewal of public service. One relatively easy reform would be the elimination or severe reduction of noncareer ambassadorial appointments, ending a spoils system where presidential friends and contributors are selected as America’s face to the world.

Since the Kennedy administration, in a practice unique among Western democracies, 30 to 40 percent of US ambassadors have been appointees. As of July, 60 percent of Obama’s picks have been political, including many who have given considerable amounts of campaign cash to the president and fellow Democrats. Take Obama’s recent appointment of former **Goldman Sachs** banker **Philip Murphy** as ambassador to Germany. According to the **Center for Responsive Politics**, Murphy and his wife have given \$1.5 million to federal candidates since 1989, 94 percent of that to Democrats, not to mention the \$100,000 they contributed to Obama’s inauguration committee. CRP also found that sixteen other appointments were linked to some \$6.8 million for Obama’s campaign and inaugural festivities. Among them are investment banker **Louis Susman**, ambassador to Britain, and lawyer **John Roos**, ambassador to Japan. Neither man has diplomatic training—Roos does not even speak Japanese—but the two bundled \$900,000 for Obama’s campaign and inauguration.

SEBASTIAN JONES

POLLITT, POET: Only last year, longtime *Nation* favorite **Katha Pollitt** was stirring up the blogosphere with the personal essays she collected in *Learning to Drive: And Other Life Stories* (now in paperback). Her new collection, **The Mind-Body Problem** (Random House), is a book of poems, and the two books would make for a provocative and satisfying boxed set.

Readers who revel in Pollitt’s crisp

humor, soundly made sentences and memorable comparisons will find plenty to savor in these poems, often as playful as they are moving. The landscape here is friendly ground: the intersecting lives of New York City, the peculiar habits of memory and the lively presence of literary and historical characters in the life of the mind.

While *The Mind-Body Problem* is steeped in compassion for the human condition, it’s also a righteously graceful dossier on the misuses of power and the resulting waste of human spirit. Whether she’s writing about the deadly days of **Jane Austen** heroines (“Talk about rural idiocy!”) or channeling **Job** after that little incident with the boils (“People even said he looked taller / in his fine new robes: *You see? / When one door closes, two doors open*”), she asks us to ask ourselves, Just who’s in charge here, anyway? Can we as vulnerable people—lovers, mothers, children, writers, citizens—speak truth and humor to power and make a stand worth recording? Pollitt’s book answers with a triumphant and confident yes. EMILY GORDON

COOKIE CRUMBLES: **Stella D’oro**, the famed New York cookiemaker, announced on July 6 that it will close its Bronx factory in October, leaving more than 130 workers without jobs. Stella D’oro’s owners, the private equity firm **Brynwood Partners**, made the announcement just days after a judge ordered the company to reinstate its workers, who had been on strike since August 2008 after Brynwood tried to impose deep wage and benefit cuts.

Brynwood bought Stella D’oro from **Kraft Foods** in 2006 for \$17.5 million but now claims that the cookiemaker is “not sustainable” and needs to reduce labor costs. When the workers, members of **Local 50** of the **Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers International Union**, fought back, Brynwood decided to simply close shop. This business model is all too typical of the private equity ownership approach, according to **Stephen Lerner**, director of the **Private Equity Project** at **SEIU**. “Being merely profitable isn’t good enough for private equity: they need to cut costs to the bone to generate the returns they promised their investors. The quickest and easiest way to cut costs is to go after workers.” IVONNE SALAZAR

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