

Another Crony? It's Enough to Make You Sick. Or Dead.

**An OpEdNews.com Article and
A Blog Entry in Comments From Left Field and GordonTalk,
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The New Republic is running quite a cover story, about our "[Hackocracy](#)"—our government of, by, and for the political hacks, cronies, or whatever else you want to call 'em (other than "well qualified" for their appointed plum positions)—and while Michael "You want me to be this superhero" Brown got his sorry butt kicked outa FEMA before the *TNR* list was made (but not soon enough to save the folks down South from drowning in the sewage), and while the Number One spot on the *TNR* list was reserved for none other than our beloved Supreme Crony nominee, Harriet Miers, Number Seven in this rogue's gallery is Number One by me.

Meet Stewart Simonson, who—as "Assistant Secretary for Public Health and Emergency Preparedness, Department of Health and Human Services" (Who thinks up these titles anyway?)—is in charge of "matters related to bioterrorism and other public health emergencies."

And just who is this individual charged with safeguarding the nation against a devastating attack of smallpox from Osama Bin Laden or a cataclysmic pandemic of bird flu from Southeast

Asia? A graduate from the School of Public Health at Johns Hopkins University? Someone who, say, ran the Office of Emergency Management for New York City? Perhaps the leader of the George Washington University Response to Emergencies and Disasters Institute?

Uh, no, that would be [the fellow whom Simonson replaced](#), Jerome "Jerry" Hauer, [one of the nation's leading experts on bioterrorism and emergency preparedness](#), who complained after getting the boot that "the decisions being made [at the agency] do not appear to have a sound basis."

Well, Jerry, you'll excuse me for saying so; but that sounds like it just might be some sour grapes on your part. I mean, surely Mr. Simonson brings to this position—with the responsibility of protecting the health and lives of some 300 million Americans—his own résumé of expertise.

Well, as the *TNR* article puts it, Stewart Simonson's experience is "not in public health, but ... public transit": Before becoming Assistant

Secretary for yada, yada, yada, Mr. Simonson was head of Amtrak.

Uh, oh.

You see, good ol' Stewart was brought onboard the Health & Human Services train by its "conductor," Tommy Thompson, who had previously been on the board of Amtrak.

And before that, Simonson had been the staff lawyer working on prison policy for then-Governor of Wisconsin Tommy Thompson.

That's right, folks: **The person in charge of our country's public health—that's your health and mine, John and Jane Q. Public—in the event of any sort of bio-emergency is a lawyer, not a doctor or anyone else with an iota of formal training in the field.**

Perhaps that's why even though Simonson has, according to his official biography, "supervised policy development for Project BioShield"—to build-up the nation's pharmaceutical armamentarium against biological, chemical, and radiological attack—the project itself is on the critical list.

And perhaps that's why—as [Rep. Henry Waxman \(D-Calif.\) has documented, with his own "top crony list"](#)—just one day after Simonson assured the Congress that his agency had sufficient funds to buy flu vaccine and anti-viral medicines, they had to go back to Congress and ask for another \$150 million to buy flu vaccine and anti-viral medicines ... and a few

months later Congress gave them another \$4 billion to buy flu vaccine and anti-viral medicines.

So, after reading on the (virtual) front page of [the New York Times](#) earlier this week that "a plan developed by the Bush administration to deal with any possible outbreak of pandemic flu shows that the United States is woefully unprepared for what could become the worst disaster in the nation's history"—["like having a Category 5 viral hurricane hit every single state simultaneously"](#)—I now learn that a world-class expert on public health has been replaced as "Assistant Secretary for Saving Our Bacon from Bio-Apocalypse" by some guy who knows more about malpractice suits than decontamination suits.

It sorta makes me long for the good ol' days of the Arabian Horse Association.