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LOSING THE BASE: In his race for governor of Alabama, Congressman **Artur Davis** positioned himself far to the right of national Democrats. That earned him lots of plaudits from pundits who portrayed him as a “New South” coalition builder. Then Davis became the only member of the **Congressional Black Caucus** to vote against legislation addressing the healthcare crisis.

His populist primary foe, Alabama agriculture commissioner **Ron Sparks**, saw an opening and declared, “I will not let any Democrat in Alabama forget that Artur Davis voted against healthcare reform.” Sparks, who is white, won endorsements from the state’s oldest major African-American political group, the Alabama Democratic Conference, as well as from many of the state’s most prominent African-American leaders and labor unions, like the **United Mine Workers** and the **United Auto Workers**.

On June 1 he beat Davis by almost a 2-to-1 margin in what the *Birmingham News* called “one of the more remarkable upsets in Alabama primary history.” JOHN NICHOLS

PENCILS UP: For our fifth annual student writing contest, we’re looking for thoughtful student voices to answer this question in 800 words: how has your education been compromised by budget cuts and tuition hikes?

We’ll select five finalists and two winners—one from college, the other from high school. Each will receive a \$1,000 prize and a *Nation* subscription. Finalists will receive \$200. The winning essays will be published in the magazine and featured at TheNation.com.

Entries will be accepted through June 30, and a winner will be announced by September 15. The contest is open to all matriculated high school students and undergraduates at US schools, colleges and universities, as well as those receiving high school or college degrees in 2010. E-mail entries to studentprize@thenation.com.

Check out thenation.com/students to read previous winning essays.

SPEAKING OUT ON ISRAEL: **J Street**, the pro-Israel, pro-peace lobby that seeks to get the US more seriously engaged in the Middle East peace process, was quick to decry the deadly attack by Israeli forces on an aid ship as the “shocking outcome of an effort to bring humanitarian relief to the people of Gaza.” As part of a broader plea for “immediate action” toward a “two-state resolution that protects Israel and frees the Palestinian people,” J Street called for an inquiry “to establish responsibility for the violence and bloodshed” and an “immediate end to the blockade of civilian and humanitarian items from entering Gaza, subject to inspection and screening to prevent the import of arms and weapons.” That’s a reasonable response. Unfortunately, it didn’t gain much traction in official Washington, where *The Hill* described the reaction to the attack as “somewhat muted.”

While **President Obama** and House Speaker **Nancy Pelosi** called for a “credible and transparent” investigation, they eschewed even mild criticism of the attack or the blockade. A number of Democrats joined Republicans in urging the US to “veto any biased UN resolutions” condemning Israel, while Senator **John McCain** criticized Obama for not backing Israel enough. On the other side, Congressman Dennis Kucinich circulated a letter to colleagues calling on the US to “remind Israel as well as all of our other friends and allies: It is not acceptable to repeatedly violate international law.”

Arguably the most outspoken Democrat was outside Washington, however. California Congressional candidate **Marcy Winograd**, a co-founder of **LA Jews for Peace**, bluntly decried the attack that left at least nine people on the aid ship dead. Despite being locked in a tight primary race with Congresswoman **Jane Harman**, who has made unblinking support of Israel central to her appeal to the Los Angeles-area district’s many Jewish voters, Winograd pulled no punches: “Violence begets violence. Hatred begets hatred. Enough, we must stop this, and adhere to the laws that have been established by the international community.... As a Jewish woman of conscience, I invite my opponent, Jane Harman, another Jewish woman, and all of Congress to join me in denouncing this kind of barbaric violence, demanding an end to the blockade, and

seeking an international investigation into these murders. I recommit myself to working towards a true, just and lasting peace.”

JOHN NICHOLS

RIDE ON: On May 29 actor, filmmaker and artist **Dennis Hopper** died at 74. At *The Nation*, Hopper will be remembered as a longtime friend and supporter. For the public, he will be forever memorialized as the star of **Easy Rider** (1969), the countercultural touchstone he also wrote and directed, a film that helped launch the brief but glorious era of New Hollywood, when style, substance and smarts found a place in the studio system. Among his friends, however, Hopper will be celebrated as a man as complex and inspiring as he was iconic.

A couple of months before his death, Hopper received a star on Hollywood Boulevard’s Walk of Fame. Actor **Viggo Mortensen** gave an eloquent and moving tribute on that occasion, and when we heard of Hopper’s death, we published those remarks at TheNation.com. Here’s an excerpt:

“Aside from being a complete and fertile artist, Dennis has, most importantly, remained a constant source of ideas, inspiration and humor for his friends and colleagues. This positive influence has manifested itself in his unceasing interest in people and their behavior, in the unpredictability of life—an openness that has often involved changing his mind and letting go of preconceived notions regarding art and morality in his life, and in the lives of others. Like any true artist, he has continually learned from, suffered over, and, as frequently as possible, laughed at his own mistakes and apparent dead-ends. He keeps himself honest, and he keeps those around him honest. ‘Why do you say that?’ ‘Where did that come from?’ ‘Who did it first?’ ‘Why does it matter?’ ‘Maybe I’m wrong.’ ‘I love you’—these are some of the phrases likely to come out of his mouth at any time. His candor and essential modesty inspire fearlessness in others. As much as he deserves this star on Hollywood Boulevard and the many other professional honors he has received, it is this ability to instill a degree of fearlessness and wonder that sets him apart as an artist and as a friend.”

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